

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION

September
2006

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

A vibrant, 3D-rendered scene featuring several anthropomorphic farm animals. In the center is a large white cow with a black face and a red nose, looking surprised. To its right is a large pink pig with a wide, toothy grin. In the foreground, a yellow chicken with a red comb and a small white chick are looking towards the left. A brown dog is also visible on the left. The background shows a lush green field with trees under a blue sky.

Meet the Party Animals of
Steve Oedekerk's
Barnyard

The Reptilian Thrills
**of Snakes
on a Plane**

**SIGGRAPH's
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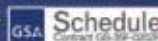


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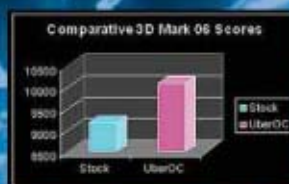
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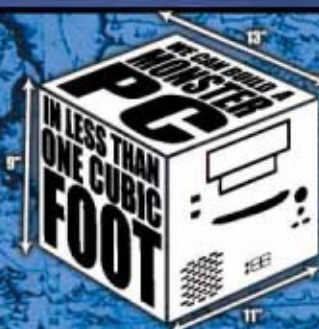
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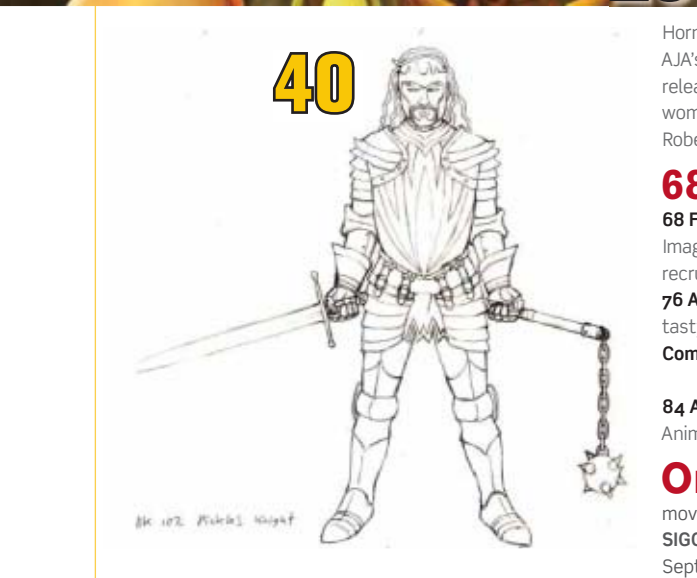
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On the Cover: Paramount/Nickelodeon's *Barney* puts the moo back into movies.

SIGGRAPH Cover: Sony Pictures Imageworks' *Open Season* will be in business in U.S. theaters on September 29, 2006.





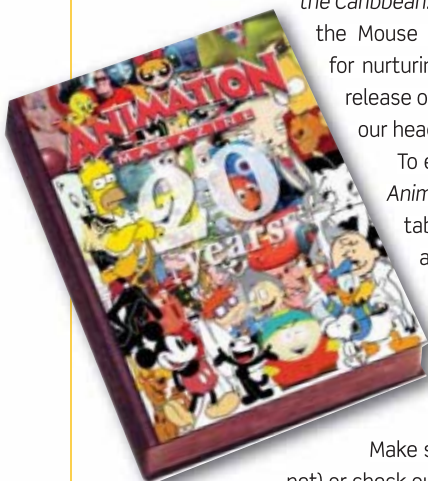
It's funny how we can mark the passage of months and seasons by the animation and vfx events we cover in the pages of this magazine. As we get ready to file away last month's Comic-Con event in San Diego, where more than 104,000 took in all the pre-release hype surrounding future fantasy films, animated movies and series, we are getting ready to head over to Boston to immerse ourselves in the CG playground known as SIGGRAPH.

It was a thrill to chat with many of the animation experts involved with the festival and share their optimism and forward-thinking state of mind. As vfx pro and SIGGRAPH's Computer Animation Festival chair Terrence Masson noted, the visual bar has been raised so high for so long now that it's easy to take all the quality of technical achievements for granted. After sifting through some 726 submissions this year, he and his jury were more impressed by projects that surprised or moved them or brought a smile to their faces. In other words, regardless of what they try to sell you on reality TV these days, good looks alone won't win you the top prizes.

This week, we also saw a lot of articles about how studios are getting more nervous about investing big bucks in features that may tank at the box office. With the terrible layoffs at Disney both in Burbank and overseas (650 employees, 20% of total staff), there seems to be a certain confusing paradox at work. As the studio's *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* sets box-office records nationally, the Mouse House axes Nina Jacobson who was responsible for nurturing the project and announces that it will cut down release output to 12 or 13 projects a year. We're all scratching our heads over that one.

To end on a positive note, I'd like to let you know about *Animation Magazine's* upcoming 20th anniversary coffee-table book. Charting the ups and down of our favorite art form and industry over the past two decades, this collector's item will include insightful pieces by the likes of John Lasseter, Craig McCracken, Bill Plympton, Sander Schwartz, John Canemaker, Leonard Maltin and other toon and vfx luminaries as well as colorful reproductions of all of our covers.

Make sure you visit our website (www.animationmagazine.net) or check out the magazine next month to find out how you can order this limited-edition volume.



Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
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Quote of the Month

"Barney (voiced by the great Mel Blanc) was squat and had enormous feet, and you know what they say about big feet: It must be why he attracted such a cave-babe as his curvy wife, Betty."

— Ken Tucker in *Entertainment Weekly* on why Barney Rubble is No. 34 on the list of the greatest sidekicks of all time, topped by Ed McMahon! Other animated and vfx-related characters on the list: Chewbacca (No. 4), Donkey (No. 12), Smithers (No. 16), Gromit (No. 21), Bender (No. 46), Piglet (No. 41) and Ford Prefect (No. 36).



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The Animation Planner

September

FRAME-BY-FRAME

1 In Mike (King of the Hill) Judge's new live-action film, *Idiocracy*, Luke Wilson becomes the smartest man alive after being frozen for a thousand years. If you live in Toronto, you should be taking in the sights and sounds of the **FanExpo Canada** thru the 3rd (www.hobbystar.com/ComicConToronto2006/CC_Main.asp).



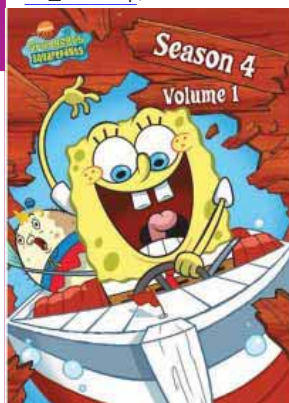
Idiocracy

4-8 If computer graphics piques your interest and you happen to be in Vienna, Austria, then you may find yourself drawn to the **Eurographics 2006** confab this week (www.cg.tuwien.ac.at/events/EG06/index.php).

5 Eclectic is the key word for today as new DVDs on the market include *Adventures of Chico and Guapo: Complete First Season*, *The Animation Show Box Set*, *Charlie and Lola: Vols. 1 and 2*, *The Flintstones: The Complete Sixth Season* (yup, that's the one with green alien, Gazoo) as well as *Gerald McBoing Boing: Adventures* and *Fairytales*.



Charlie and Lola



6-8 Woah, dude, it's time for the totally rad **Austin Game Conference** again (www.gameconference.com).

11 Denmark's **Animation Workshop** offers a 3Dtoon course in Viborg thru Dec. 15 (www.animwork.dk/Default.asp?ID=8).



12 **Cartoon Network Halloween3: Sweet Sweet Fear** and *Casper's Scare School* are a couple of early Halloween DVD releases. We can also get our hands on *SpongeBob SquarePants: Season 4, Vol. 1* and *Code Lyoko: Season 1*.

14 Vancouver, British Columbia, hosts the **Canadian Awards for the Electronic and Animated Arts** (www.caeaa.com).



Everyone's Hero

15 IDT Entertainment's star-studded feature *Everyone's Hero*, which was the late Christopher Reeve's last project, opens in theaters this weekend.

19 Fans of Nickelodeon's hit series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* can rejoice. The *Complete Book 1* DVD collection hits stores today. It'll cost you \$60, but it's worth every cent. Also up for grabs: *Cartoon Network Fridays Vol. 1* and *Scooby-Doo in Pirates Ahoy!*

20-24 The fantabulous **Ottawa International Animation Festival** celebrates its 30th birthday (<http://ottawa.awn.com>). Meanwhile, in Pau-Pyrénées, France, another group of toon players attend the well-regarded **Cartoon Forum** event (www.cartoon-media.be).

22 Christian Volckman's Anecny prize-winning feature, *Renaissance*, gets a U.S. release courtesy of Miramax.



26 Daylight savings is around the corner, so we need extra cheering up. Maybe today's new DVD release—*Fullmetal Alchemist Vol. 13*, *Laura's Star*, *Teen Titans: Complete Second Season* and *The Batman: Complete Second Season*—can chase the gloom away.



Laura's Star

29 Sony Pictures Animation tests the CG feature waters with its early fall offering, *Open Season*. Also opening in theaters today is director Alfonso Cuarón's creepy futuristic movie, *Children of Men*. For a taste of the best of Spanish animation, you can hop a flight to Madrid and enjoy *Animadrid 2006* (www.animadrid.com).



Children of Men

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

FRAME-BY-FRAME

BOOKS WE LOVE

by Sarah Gurman

Thinking Animation: Bridging the Gap Between 2D and CG
By Angie Jones and Jamie Oliff [Thompson Course Tech, \$39.99]
Better Game Characters by Design
By Katherine Ibister [Morgan Kaufman, \$49.95]

One of the many pleasures of SIGGRAPH is that it reminds us there is such a thing as CG with soul—which can be easy to forget sometimes. Animators Angie Jones and Jamie Oliff deserve kudos for pitching in for CG cause with their timely offering from Thompson Course Technology *Thinking Animation: Bridging the Gap Between 2D and CG*, which serves up methods for bringing the chutzpah and finesse of the 2D tradition to the 3D world. Addressing all animators from the traditional toon-heads who are dragging their feet into the digital age to the CG trailblazers who now have to hang with the new crossovers, Jones and Oliff explore all of the elements that add up to quality toons and take special care to recognize the innovators who pushed the medium to new levels over the years.

Thinking Animation's no-nonsense prose and clever illustrations reveal the nuances of vital concepts like visual storytelling, developing memorable characters, the relationship between 2D, 3D and visual effects, animation acting and navigating the corporate side of the industry. For \$39.99 you can grab all sorts of inspiration—the great toon timeline running across the bottom of the pages and anecdote-filled interviews with pros are two abundant sources. And really, you can't put a price on hints like this from Darin McGowan, "Helpful tip: Remember that most company first-aid cabinets have cold medication. Some cold medication con-

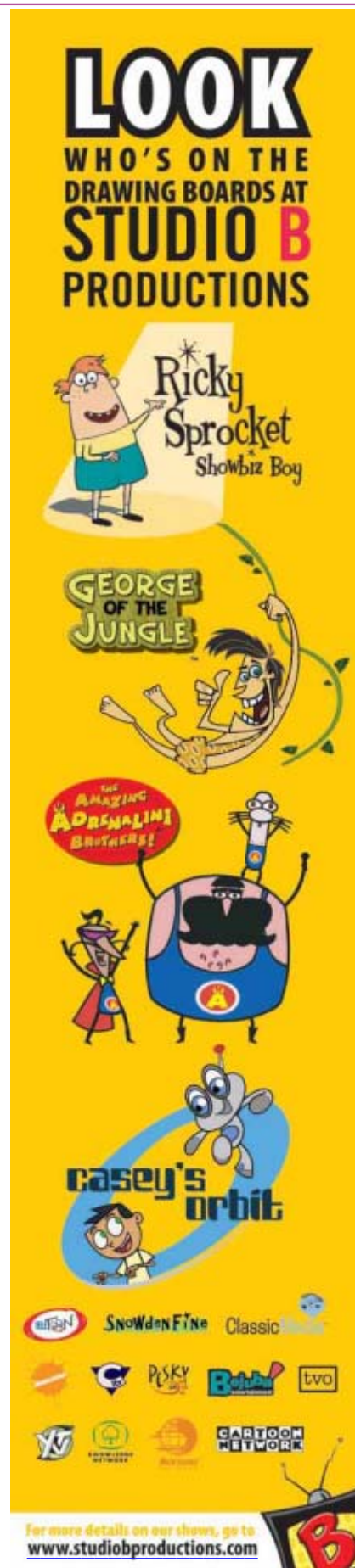
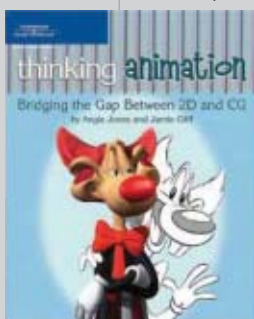
tains speed! Keep that in mind for the next all-nighter you have to pull."

For you game designers out there, while you're all hopped up on Sudafed, it might be a good time to consider pushing your characters to the next level (in the psychological sense this time). Curl up with all of that decongestant energy and a copy of *Better Game Characters By Design*, and tap into the brain waves of game players and their joy-pad alter egos. After studying the relationship between game characters and their audiences for the past 10 years, Katherine Ibister found

that the compelling aspects of real life social interactions provide a strong basis for engaging electronic personalities. Usually character development is emphasized more in other media like animation and live-action films, but Ibister's focus seems particularly apt because of the interactive relationship between the player and the

game.

Better Game Characters By Design sums up basic psychological principles that can be applied to the gaming world to make characters carry more emotional weight. Referencing illustrations and examples from existing games, Ibister delves into the impact of gender, culture, body language, tone of voice and other cues that will affect the way players read the heroes and villains populating their XBOX world. The companion DVD also features actual clips from popular games to demonstrate the successful execution of the concepts introduced in the text. It seems the text would gain strength from colored illustrations (they're black and white) as there is so much emphasis visual cues and color has a significant impact on the way a design resonates. Overall, Ibister has delivered an impressive package that will leave you wondering about Sonic the Hedgehog's need for speed and Lara Croft's potential trust issues long after the button-mashing session has ended. ■



Pros Tackle Trends at Anime Expo

As over 40,000 fans flooded the floor at Anime Expo held in Anaheim, Calif. last month, more than a dozen of the industry's top executives assembled to discuss the state of the growing anime and manga businesses in a special panel moderated by animation expert Charles Solomon.

The maturing market for anime has been moving away from being based solely in home video and into more mainstream outlets that reach a broader audience. That broader audience is reflected at Anime Expo, where the attendance base is 50% female, said Trulee Karahashi of the Society for Promotion of Japanese Animation, the nonprofit group that organizes the expo.

Ken Iyadomi, president and CEO of Bandai, said the anime business is getting riskier, with increasing budgets and the growing threat of online piracy.

Most panelists generally agreed that the best way to fight it is to make content easily and legally available online. "We have to offer a commercially viable alternative to piracy," said Anthony Jiwa, director of marketing for VIZ Media, distributor of popular titles such as *Naruto*, *Inuyasha* and *Zatch Bell*.

Robyn Mukai, marketing manager for Urban Vision (*Ninja Scroll*, *Vampire Hunter D*) said offering high-quality DVDs with extras that can't be found elsewhere will encourage fans to buy the official release. "The ones who are really true fans are more likely to buy the DVD, the official product," she said. "We try to create things specifically for our DVD releases that would make them want to buy it."

Eric Calderon, VP of creative affairs for GDH International, who is working on the company's much-anticipated *Afro Samurai* series, said the company plans to create content so compelling that fans will be more than willing to pay for official releases. "We want to give people something they have to see in the format we put it out in," he said.

The manga market has been fragmenting as it has matured, with a growing gap between hits and the bulk of the market. "Lesser known properties are having more of a struggle in finding their audience," said David Wise, CEO of GoComi.

There are new outlets showing up for manga, such as cell phones, a market that's growing by leaps and bounds in Japan. As the market in Japan approaches saturation, animation companies are looking to and considering the needs of the international markets to grow their business. The panel-

ists agreed that one area which anime has had trouble penetrating is the theatrical market. Most of that comes down to the high cost of making prints and marketing films.

—By Thomas McLean



Sprocket Rockets to Nick

Fans of Alison Snowden and David Fine's popular *Bob and Margaret* series have a new show to look forward to in the fall of 2007. The duo's latest creation, **Ricky Sprocket—Showbiz Boy**, centers on a huge superstar child actor who has the same problems regular kids have at home (i.e. annoying sister, headache-inducing homework, etc.). The traditionally animated 26x22 toon is produced by Snowden Fine Prods. and Studio B, distributed by Bejuba! Ent. and has already been picked up by Nickelodeon channels in the U.K., Australia, Latin America, Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Scandinavia. In the U.S., the show will pop up on Nicktoons, while in Canada, *Ricky* will rule on Teletoon. We're sure Dakota Fanning and Frankie Muniz will become instant fans. ■



Animated Cities

According to the Google Trend spotting website (www.google.com/trends) residents of the following cities submitted the highest number of animation-related searches:



Source: www.google.com/trends 7/14/2006

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Going Loco!

Sony's *LocoRoco* rocks the planet on PSP. by Ryan Ball



With the casual games market exploding, the major players in the console and handheld markets are riding out to catch the wave with their own innovative titles aimed at non-traditional gamers. Sony Computer Entertainment America is hoping to lure the *Diner Dash* crowd and others with its addictive 2D time-waster, *LocoRoco* for PSP. Featuring adorable characters, colorful eye candy and truly unique gameplay dynamics, this single-player actioner has generated a lot of buzz and is sure to build a dedicated fan base when it debuts in September.

Developed by Sony Computer Entertainment Japan, *LocoRoco* is the brainchild of director/senior game designer Tsutomu Kouno, who previously worked on planning, direction and design of Sony's *Legend of Dragoon* and *Ico*. With *LocoRoco*, Kouno wanted to create a game that utilized the PSP's controls in a whole new way.

The game casts the player in the role of a planet that fell asleep one day. While the planet slept, a comet crashed to the surface and unleashed creatures called Moja, which attacked the native population of cute, cuddly LocoRoco. Using the "L" and "R" shoulder

buttons on the PSP, the player can tilt and bump the planet's landscape to help the happy little yellow blobs navigate through more than 40 levels. It's kind of like gym class when the coach would break out the old parachute and have everybody roll and bounce balls around on it, only the LocoRoco also have to find fruit to eat while avoiding the hungry Moja.

There are six different types of LocoRoco, each with their own voices and signature actions. They can remain round to roll across the surface,



stretch out to squeeze through narrow passages and even break down into smaller LocoRoco to negotiate small crevasses and paths. Dictated by the landscape, the squishy movements required a level of squash and stretch that is rarely seen in video games, which in turn called for some

clever programming and a lot of tweaking.

"I wanted to create something that you can enjoy by just watching, something that changes its movement every time you watch," Kouno tells us. "So, the LocoRoco's body is programmed by using a calculated spring method." He adds that things not controlled by the programming, such as facial expressions and mouth movements, were animated with Maya. For the Moja characters, Kouno wanted the hair to look real, so his team programmed it separately.

While few developers are creating 2D platform games, Kouno says the style allows players to get a better grip on the rules of the game, while also giving the title characters more face time. "If it were 3D, the characters' faces could be invisible depending on the camera's location, and the game could become difficult as you would need to control the camera," he notes. "Although I would also like to create some realistic 3D games, I thought that a game that is easily understandable is necessary for the current market."

Kouno also says the PSP provides the perfect vessel for *LocoRoco* because the proximity of the "L" and "R" buttons to the screen allows players to tilt the landscape and the screen at the same time. At present, there are no set plans to bring the game to other platforms. ■

SCEA's *LocoRoco* for PSP hits stores in September. For more info, visit www.locoroco.jp/home.



Spy Hard

Midway and Terminal Reality blow The Rock's cover in *Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run*. **by Ryan Ball**

Fans of the classic *Spy Hunter* arcade game can look forward to getting back behind the wheel of the Interceptor for more turbo-charged excitement as Midway serves up a whole new mission with *Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run*. The game is being released in September in advance of Universal's upcoming feature film, which has run into some production snags but is slated to hit screens in the summer of 2007.

In the game, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson lends his voice and likeness to the role of Alex Decker, a former F-15 pilot who joins an elite international espionage outfit and sets out to stop the evil NOSTRA Corporation from stealing government technology, including the G-6155 Interceptor. Since they were driving games, the first two titles in the franchise were all about the car. But to take full advantage of The Rock's physical prowess, Midway and developer Terminal Reality made some major changes this time around.

Despite its title, the new game does offer some places to run. For the first time in franchise history, players are able to get out of the car and take on enemies on foot. Using a combination of brute strength, an arsenal of firearms and the latest special ops gadgets, our hero takes on the bad guys on and off the road. Those who have followed

Johnson's wrestling career will especially appreciate such melee combat moves as the body slam, the head butt and the spinning back fist.

"Our goal was to get back to the core roots of what *Spy Hunter* is, but then also add some gameplay elements so as to breathe new life into the series," says the game's producer, Darren Walker. "Initially we thought about adding a bunch more car transformations, and while that would have been nice, it wasn't going to put us where we needed to be. We needed a new solid base for *Spy Hunter* moving forward."

In preserving key elements from the original games, Walker and his team focused on the classic lateral combat involving oil slicks and smoke screens, but then added tire spikes and sticky mines to make things a bit more interesting. "Like the classic, the Interceptor will transform automatically into various vehicle types like the boat and motorcycle," he adds. "We also added a very rewarding surprise that pays great homage to the classic *Spy Hunter* game."

According to Walker, Terminal Reality collaborated with the film's producers early in the devel-

opment cycle, but decided they wanted to make the new game more of a series prequel that introduces the Alex Decker character and establishes the technology behind the Interceptor. "We wanted to keep the same timelines, but have an entirely separate story for the player to enjoy," Walker states. "With Dwayne doing all his own mo-capping and voicing for Decker, this made a huge impact and helped in achieving this goal."

More than 50 animated cinematic sequences have been created to help drive the story along and get gamers to experience each cool, interactive environment. Using the melee moves, players can throw and punch enemies into collapsible beams, bookcases and other destructible elements. In addition, random objects such as hammers and wrenches can be picked up and used as weapons to complement an already-beefy arsenal.

When asked about his favorite new trick in Decker's bag, Walker responds, "I really enjoy the tire spikes, but the coolest weapon in the game has to be the Salvo Mode. This weapon lets you target enemies anywhere on the screen and unleash a vicious attack. It is available to use at key areas throughout the game and you can use it to destroy cars, boats, helicopters and structures in the environment. The Rock has some awesome moves as well, like the reverse slam and head drop." I think we all smell what The Rock is cookin'. ■

***Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run* is rated for teens and will be available in September for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. The game's official website is www.thespyhunter.com.**



The Rock, animated, and live action (above).



Waddery Irresistible

Hilarious CG-animated animals rule the roost in Steve Oedekerk's happy, shiny *Barnyard*. by Ramin Zahed

We've all wondered from time to time about the secret lives of our beloved pets. What kind of mischief do Fido and Tabby get into when we're not around? Trust Steve Oedekerk, the brilliant mind behind such comic hits as *Bruce Almighty*, *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* and the hilarious *Thumb* movie parodies (*Thumb Wars*, *Thumbtanic*), to answer these age-old questions when his sparkling new CG-animated feature *Barnyard* raises the roof in theaters across the country this month.

Produced by Nickelodeon Movies and animated at Omaton Studios, Oedekerk's airy new toon studio in San Clemente, Calif. *Barnyard* centers on a carefree trickster cow named Otis (voiced perfectly by Kevin

James) who learns a tough lesson about becoming more responsible by the end of the story. The always energetic Oedekerk says the original idea for the movie came to him over 18 years ago.

"The basic premise came to me one day when this dog was looking at me in a very human sort of way," he recalls. "I could see him standing on two legs and playing poker with the cat when I wasn't around. Then years later I really liked these great cow sculptures done by Mark

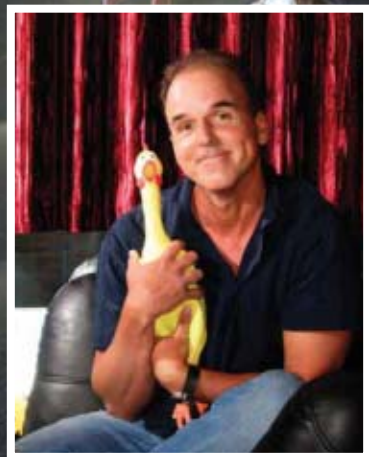
Beam at a Laguna Beach gallery ... and that was the cow that would eventually become Otis!"

Oedekerk's involvement with the genre goes back to the days of the TV sketch show, steve.oedekerk.com, a series that was noteworthy for its use of CG animation back in 1997. Then came the feature *Santa vs. the Snowman* (directed by John A. Davis), which was converted to 3D in 2002. "I've been into CG for a long time, but I'm not a trend follower," remarks Oedekerk. "I like to be working and planning things that are new and other people are afraid to touch. I do believe that

FEATURE



Funny Farm: Reminiscent of Gary Larson's popular *Far Side* cartoon strips, Steve Oedekerk's *Barnyard* buddies are voiced by a stellar cast which includes Kevin James, Courteney Cox, Sam Elliott, Danny Glover, Andie MacDowell, Wanda Sykes and Rob Paulsen.



Steve Oedekerk



CG is going to continue to be the focal point for everyone. We're going to see more user-friendly tools like Flash become more popular with indie animators. What I would hope to see is that the CG-trend idea will take a back seat to the story and what is the absolute best tool set to serve each individual project. What killed 2D animation a few

years ago was the release of some mediocre movies. It's easier for someone to say 'Cel animation is dead,' instead of taking responsibility for making the bad movies."

Judging from the positive buzz and audience reactions to the film's trailer (which has been playing in theaters before many of this summer's family releases), *Barnyard* is going to carry the CG torch fired up by Pixar and DreamWorks Animation. Julia Pistor, exec VP of Nickelodeon Movies, who championed the project after seeing an early drawing in Oedekerk's office, says *Barnyard* reminds her of another huge Nickelodeon cultural landmark. "The film has such a wonderful pop graphic look—it reminds me of *SpongeBob*," says Pistor. "There's great texture work as well as ex-

cellent primary colors ... and I think the animators really succeeded in giving the film a storybook, stylized look. In terms of the characters, you really want to hang out with them, kind of like the regulars on the TV show, *Cheers*."

Pistor goes as far as saying that the movie is a throwback to the glory days of feature animation at Disney. "It has wacky characters and great moments of comedy, but it also has a lot of heart, family values and emotion. And although it looks fantastic, it's been produced for much less than our competition. Steve and [exec producer] Aaron Parry did a lot of innovative things together to get that look."

For Parry, one of the biggest challenges was setting up the pipelines for Omaton's first feature project and making sure that the production money makes it up on the screen. As he explains, "We partnered with Softimage|XSI and also set up a Mental Ray



Julia Pistor, exec VP of Nickelodeon Movies





pipeline, which we picked because they helped us evolve the look of the landscape. We have these 40-mile-wide landscapes, and that can be a challenging task for any animation software. Sun Microsystems partnered with us to create one of the largest render farms on the West Coast."


To imagine the enormity of the animation task, all you need to know is that 178 individual characters had to be built for the movie. The process began in October of 2004, and it took over eight months for the team to rig, model and texture everything, says Parry. "Of course, because this is a first-time studio, you are trying to improve the process as you go along."

A rowdy party scene featuring all the farm animals is the setting for one of the project's many technical innovations. To create the wild energy associated with the scene, the team used a hybridized process, pairing performance-capture sequences shot on Omaton's own mo-cap stage with character animation done on Alias/Kaydara's MotionBuilder and keyframing work for characters seen closer to the camera. The result is a stunningly festive scene in which every animal, even the ones

seen in deep background, is doing something different and original.

Continuing on the different and original path is high on Oedeker's goal for his new studio. Although 2006 has been an insanely busy period for the Oscar-nominated hyphenate (he also wrote the script for the *Bruce Almighty* sequel, *Evan Almighty*, starring Steve Carell), he has many more projects in the pipeline. Nickelodeon has already begun work on a *Barnyard* series, which is set to premiere on the cable in the fall of 2007. Omaton has several other toons in development, which Oedeker is envisioning for mobile platforms. But maybe this month, he'll be able to find the time to just sit back and enjoy his big-hearted

toon with an appreciative family audience. "I'm really proud that we have this colorful, wonderful environment which seems real enough to walk into. But most of all, I'm glad that it has a strong, heartfelt story."

But don't expect him to stick with his favorite CG tools for too long. "At Omaton, we're not going to have a particular look. I think it's important to have the right look for each project. You've got to ask yourself what's the best tool, best style for the story. I'm even interested in getting back into cel animation now that everyone has wrongly thrown it to the side!" 

Paramount Pictures opens the doors of Steve Oedeker's *Barnyard* on August 4.

FEATURE

Holy Cow!

"I made the cow twenty-some years ago. I was looking for a big, dopey animal to make into a sculpture doing a handstand: It was sculpted out of foam, so it was very light. Therefore, I could make a big cow and it would look like it was defying gravity ... The piece was eight feet tall. Steve [Oedeker] bought the cow sculpture from a gallery in Laguna Beach. We met a few years later, and he told me of his interest in making a CGI project and wanted the cow to be the central character ... It took many years, but it all finally came together.

— Artist Mark Beam (www.markbeam.com)





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Alex Weil

a number of shaders and a whole lot of little tools here and there to get the most out of the Mental Ray renderer," Godwin says, "because straight out of the box, the connection between Maya and Mental Ray wasn't what we needed for this particular project."

Obviously, software alone cannot turn photorealistic vermin into Romeo and Juliet. Lead animators Wilson, Tony Tabtong and Pat Porter worked closely with every other department on the film to instill genuine emotion into the characters and situation. "The charge was to keep it as real as possible, to hold back and not make it cartoony," says Tabtong. "To get that emotion out of something disgusting, we played around with the camera angles. To have something look sad or heroic, we tilted the camera and had them look up or down."

Adds Porter: "We weren't afraid to sit on their deep, dark eyes for a scene, to really get into a close-up shot. By having quiet moments and those really close-up moments where you can tell that they're pondering something, the audience has a chance to ponder it as well."

To facilitate those close-ups, the filmmakers immersed themselves in rat media, and kept two live specimens, dubbed "Cagney" and "Audrey" (as in Hepburn) for their respective attitudes, which they videoed in extreme close-up with a matchbox camera. The film's live-action feeling is reinforced by a hand-held camera effect, careful lighting—particularly within the juxtaposition of the noirish street scenes with the gleaming, pristine white-lab sequence, while a moody music score by Sherman Foote enhances the romance.

Weil describes the effect of winning Best of Show as "mind-boggling. The day we found out, I smiled so much my smile muscles cramped up," he says. SIGGRAPH was the beginning of the festival trail for the film, which includes stops in Cannes, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and, in the words of executive producer Chris Byrnes, "whatever happens in between. It's very exciting seeing this take its own path." ■

To find out more about the project, visit www.oneratshort.com

The Rats Win the Race

New York commercial house Charlex is the big cheese at SIGGRAPH this year, thanks to its award-winning short, *One Rat Short*. by Michael Mallory

It's a classic story: Boy rat meets girl rat; boy rat loses girl rat; rats kick digital butt.

One Rat Short scurried past a field of 96 competitors, including such giants as Pixar, Digital Domain and Weta, to grab the 2006 SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival "Best of Show" award. It's a heady achievement for any indie CG shop, doubly so since the wordless, moody, totally affecting romance between a dark rat from the mean streets and a white rat being held at a futuristic laboratory is the first long-form project from the Emmy-winning New York-based commercial house Charlex.

Writer/director Alex Weil, who is also the company's founder and creative director, says that the project was launched as a recruiting tool, but it took on a life of its own. "This film was almost four years in the making, but not really," Weil says. "It took us a year to make this film, but it took us about two-and-a-half years to get around to making it."

Initially, *One Rat Short* was going to have a much lighter comedic tone, but a shot of street rats in a subway tunnel transformed it into a grittier, more realistic film. "I was working with animator John Wilson on a scene where you see the rats down on the track and the camera is close there, and it's really dirty and grimy, and I realized, 'There's my movie!'" Weil says.

That organic style of filmmaking continued throughout the production, says producer and art director Bryan Godwin. "Alex really likes to work with the animators in person and often times he'd go, 'Oh, that's the shot!' and all of a sudden there would be a new shot there," Godwin says. "I think one of the greatest strengths of this project was this new, more live-action approach to directing CG."

Both Maya 6 and 7 were used for the animation—a rare instance of a unit changing software mid-stream—and Mental Ray was used for the rendering, along with several proprietary links. "We needed to write



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More Bear Necessities

New characters and original ideas make the new *Brother Bear II* feature stand out in the crowded direct-to-DVD field. **by Ramin Zahed**



Director Ben Gluck

It's ironic that as DisneyToon closes the doors of its prolific and well-regarded studio in Australia, DVD viewers continue to see the examples of the fine 2D animation done by the shop. In February, fans were treated to Brian Pimental's beautifully mounted sequel to *Bambi*, which was received well by critics and consumers alike. This summer, we can take in a clever and original sequel to Disney's underrated 2003 movie, *Brother Bear*, which gets top marks for its lush 2D animation, moving storyline and excellent voice work by the likes of Mandy Moore, Patrick Dempsey, Jim Cummings, Michael Clarke Duncan, Wendie Malick, Andrea Martin and the comedy team of Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas.

"We started planning for the sequel before the first movie was released," says Susan Kirch, *Brother Bear 2*'s creative director. "Audiences are interested in seeing more stories with these characters sooner rather than later. So we started to explore how our main character would feel about taking care of his brother, in the bear world, emotionally and internally. What if someone from his past would come and haunt him?"

And that's what happens to Kenai (Dempsey). He dreams about a girl he used to know named Nita (Moore). How our hero finds this mystery woman from his past and how the two are reunited and overcome the obstacles to their happiness—he's a bear, she's a

human—is nicely told in this sequel, which also features original music and songs by Melissa Etheridge.

"It was really important for us to keep the integrity of the original movie," says director Ben Gluck, who has worked on Disney projects such as *Dinosaur*, *Piglet's Big Movie* and *Home on the Range*. "*Brother Bear* was a back-to-nature picture. It was done in a very painterly and artistic way and was a throwback to the older classic Disney movies. It also had a lot of depth and wonderful composition."

Gluck says he's proud of the fact that despite the tight production schedule and restricted budget, he and his team were able to maintain the quality of the feature film. He says



Melissa Etheridge



Patrick Dempsey



Mandy Moore

the movie's theme of being true to oneself and taking risks were also very important to him. "You have a heroine, a girl who connects with a bear...so the message is it's Okay to go against tradition and what everyone else expects of you. I think it points to a lot of current societal issues about the definition of love and family."

Producer Jim Ballantine, who also worked on the studio's *Bambi II* echoes Gluck's sentiments. "We were lucky to work from a great script by Rich Burns.

The first movie wrapped things up pretty neatly, so the idea of having Koda and Kenai having further adventure wasn't that interesting, but to add a new character from Kenai's past was something more psychologically fascinating," says Ballantine. "We tried to find a unique artistic vocabulary for this particular film. There's a lot of bright tonality to the colors in the sequel. The thing I love about the movie is the unusual story which explores a lot of deep issues. We were also very fortunate to have Melissa Etheridge involved with the music for the project. She looked at the rough version of the film with her family, and they were very moved by it. She actually wrote the songs when she was in recovery from cancer. It's very moving when you know her story, because the music talks about separation and the difficulties that life puts in front of you and how to stay true to your loved ones. That's all mirrored in the movie."

The film's influences go beyond classic character-driven features such as *Bambi*, *The Rescuers* and *Finding*

Nemo. Gluck says he also took a page for the live-action world in taking his directing cues. "I really liked Ron Howard's hand-held camera style and editing flourishes in *The Missing*, and also got inspiration from the look of Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans*."

Although the movie is traditionally animated, keen observers will still see sparks of CG throughout. Alias Maya software was employed to animate scenes featuring the Shaman fire, moose antlers, avalanche

development. But he adds that there's a big sense of disappointment and loss about the closure of the 2D studio in Australia. "We had a significantly talented pool of artists working at the studio, and there was an amazing pipeline that was set up. That's why the closure was such a disappointment."

Kirsh is on the same page. "The animation took only about a year to do and you can see that the work done by the Sydney team is stunning," she



and northern light sequences. However, chances are most viewers will be so enthralled by the storyline that they won't have the chance to dwell on the technology used to create the illusions.

Ballantine says DisneyToon will deliver more 2D goods with the sequels planned for *The Fox and the Hound* and *Cinderella*. He says *Little Mermaid 3* is also in the early stages of

notes. "I think with every new technological development, you get so much enthusiasm that the pendulum tends to swing too heavily in one direction. The truth is that there will always be a place for traditional animation. We should never rule out the audience for 2D. The story is what should determine the style of animation." ■

Disney's *Brother Bear 2* DVD will roam the stores on August 29.



Apocalypse Soon

Creator Brooke Burgess discusses *Broken Saints*, a new DVD release that offers a cool and economical method of bringing comic books to digital life. **by Jake Friedman**

Look out, fans of independent animation. There's a new method of storytelling and it's available for your inspection and enjoyment on a new DVD release called *Broken Saints*. Described as "a graphic novel brought to life," this 24-episode web-comic, which uses Flash animation for simple movements and impressive camera tricks, has garnered a following of tens of thousands, not to mention numerous awards.

"I was trying to think of a way I could reconcile my Western living tech side, my love of computer and what have you, with my growing spiritual side," says creator, writer and director Brooke Burgess. With the help of art director Andrew West and technical director Ian Kirby, Burgess produced 24 installments of the eerie, ambiance-rich storyline between early 2001 and mid 2003.

It's fitting that the piece makes direct references to dark graphic novel creators like Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore, admittedly two of Burgess's influences. The work explores the troubled lives of four people across the globe who are linked together by their visions of an upcoming apocalypse. Paced like a mini-series, characters and secrets are revealed in each installment of this episodic saga.

"Modern storytelling, especially in the West, is looking for something fast-paced with action,



and that's great, but a lot of people are getting bored with movies and TV shows because it's the same old stuff. But the powerful stuff that sits with you and helps shape you when you're younger, those are the heavier stories: things that deal with issues of emotion, politics, conspiracy, religion and human responsibility. I know there are people out there who feel the same way," adds Burgess.

Burgess got the idea for this project after leaving his job as a producer for a top video game company in the late '90s. "I kind of got tired of cranking out the same old stuff," he says. "I wanted to start telling stories that reminded me of the great anime that I had seen and the incredible comic books that I was a huge fan of." After coming back from a trip to the South Pacific, Burgess wanted to tell a story that could reconcile his tech-heavy Western lifestyle and his growing spiritual side.

Burgess teamed up with West and Kirby,



Brooke Burgess

as well as score composer Tobias Tinker, realizing that a Flash web-comic would be the best way to showcase his story. "I thought, 'We could make a graphic novel with a sense of movement, with a beautiful soundscape, and we wouldn't have to be under a studio's thumb.'"

A definite asset to *Saints* is the anime-inspired art, which is complex and more detailed than an ordinary comic (found on the web or in print). Drawn by West and digitally enhanced by Kirby, the illustrations are a feast for the eyes of the analytical artist in us all. Just as Burgess describes himself as a self-taught director, he boasts that his whole team taught themselves their respective craft.

"We're the first to say we know we're not great bastions of animation skill. We're three guys who are self-taught, who use sliding frames in Flash to create an illusion of a moving comic book. We are not animation pioneers; what we are is storytellers who took the technology that was there and used it to service a story that we thought could touch a lot of people."

In August, Fox Home Entertainment, with a grant from the government agency Telefilm Canada, will distribute a four-disc collection of the 24 episodes, completely re-mastered in 5.1 audio and with lots of behind-the-scenes features. In addition, much of the art has been redone and there is dialogue throughout, a distinct difference from the online version. Besides assigning the shot list and arranging the storyboard and visual transitions of the piece, Burgess also directed the voice actors for the DVD.

Burgess believes that the project's special message helped the team of actors, artists and financial backers come together. "The basic theme is that, as in *Lord of the Rings*, there is power in the very small and that one person can make a difference. But more important, like our characters, no matter what you're going through or where you are, we are all connected. We're part of something bigger than ourselves, and we have a responsibility to give of ourselves to sacrifice for the greater good." ■

Jake Friedman is a New-York-based animator. For more info, visit www.jakefriedman.net.

For more info, visit www.brokensaints.com.

The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the latest anime releases on DVD



Illustration by Pres Romanillos

HOME ENTERTAINMENT

by Charles Solomon

For most of its century-long history in the U.S., animation has been linked to comedy. But in recent years, Japanese animators have been outdoing their American counterparts in take-no-prisoners silliness.

Rumiko Takahashi's gender-bending comedy *Ranma 1/2* debuted as a manga in *Shōnen Sunday Comics* in 1988. It was animated a year later and has remained popular ever since: in addition to the OAV's, there have been three *Ranma* theatrical features, a long-running TV series and music videos.

The title character, Ranma Saotome is a 16-year-old martial artist who attends Furinkan High. Because he fell into a cursed spring in China, Ranma turns into a buxom, red-haired girl whenever he's splashed with cold water. (Hot water restores his proper gender.) These transformations produce endless slapstick hijinks that play better in animation than the transvestite gags in recent live-action comedies, despite the millions spent on make-up, lighting, fat suits, etc.

Ranma and his father, Genma, who turns into a panda when hit with cold water (he fell into a different pool at the cursed spring), are boarders/freeloaders in the home of Suon Tendo, the long-suffering proprietor of the Anything Goes Martial Arts Dojo. In an attempt to regularize the situation, the fathers decide that Suon's youngest daughter Akane and Ranma are engaged and will in-

herit the Dojo.

The diametrical opposite of a traditional, submissive Japanese girl, Akane is an accomplished martial artist who is completely devoid of domestic skills. But she can out-holler Yosemite Sam, and when she punches Ranma, he literally goes flying. Ranma is a rhinestone-in-the-rough who often calls Akane "uncute." They constantly get in trouble and rescue each other, but every rescue leads to a new argument.

The supporting cast includes Ryoga, who got lost trying to find the vacant lot behind his own house; school blowhard Kuno, who nurtures a crush on both Akane and "girl-type" Ranma; Shampoo, the Chinese Amazon who lusts after Ranma; and Happosai, the lecherous old teacher of Genma and Suon. Like the Simpsons, the characters in *Ranma 1/2* love each other—and drive each other crazy. When Akane knits Ranma a scarf for Christmas, it looks like the leftovers from a moth's banquet. He cheerfully dons it and gives her a framed photo—bought with money he borrowed at a usurious rate from her older sister. It's a warm, believable moment amid the chaos. This three-disc set makes an excellent introduction to one of the funniest and best-loved anime series of all time.

Animators around the world have attempted to depict the day-to-day chaos of a cartoon studio; few have succeeded with the accuracy and humor of *Animation Runner Kuromi*.

Mikiko "Kuromi" Oguro decided to pursue a career in animation because she grew up watching *Louis Monde III* (a spoof of *Lupin III*). Fresh out of art school, she lands a job as an "animation runner" (assistant production manager). On her first day, she discovers that only five of the 312 cuts (scenes) have been completed for the next episode of the series *Time Journeys*—and it's due in one week! Kuromi nags, cajoles, browbeats and threatens the animators to get the drawings out of them.

Because she did such a good job on *Time Journeys* in the first OVA, the head of the studio gives Kuromi three new series to crank out—with the same staff, on the same schedule. To make matters worse, Shihonmatsu the director quits smoking and the studio head hires Takashimadaira, a self-important jerk, as executive producer. He quickly alienates the entire staff by dismissing them as minor talents, sending



Animation Runner Kuromi

keys to be in-betweened without corrections and ignoring Shihonmatsu. Outraged, the artists revolt against Takashimadaira and bring Kuromi back, declaring all the animation comes from their hearts and souls—"even the bad stuff!"

Animation professionals who watch the *Kuromi* OVA's may suspect the filmmakers of eavesdropping on meetings they've attended. They'll also recognize the cast members, including the artist who whines, "These characters are badly designed—too many details. And they give me all the hard scenes!"

The *Kuromi* films may constitute an enormous inside joke, but it's an affectionate one, and very funny. ■

Ranma 1/2: OVA Series

[VIZ: \$49.95, 3 discs]

Animation Runner Kuromi

[U.S. Manga: \$24.99]

Animation Runner Kuromi 2

[U.S. Manga: \$19.98]



Ranma 1/2

Midsummer Night's Dream DVDs

What is it about the month of August that unleashes an avalanche of super-cool animated TV shows and movie releases on disc? **by Ramin Zahed**

Xiaolin Showdown: The First Season [Warner Bros, \$19.98] Release date: Aug. 8



Gong Yi Tan Pai. (That's ready, set, go in Chinese!) It's time to dive into the first 13 episodes of Christy Hui's *Xiaolin Showdown*, which was

one of the first in the new wave of animated series that blends Eastern and Western traditions. Introduced first in November of 2003 on Kids' WB!, the inventive toon is centered on a young monk-in-training, a Brazilian surfer, a Texan cowboy and a Japanese high-tech whiz who are chosen by head monk Master Fung to become Xiaolin Dragons and protect the sacred Shen Gong Wu artifacts. The animation is awesome, the characters are delightful and the storylines are original—what's not to like about this glorious example of multiculturalism in Toon Town?

Ultimate Avengers 2: Rise of the Panther [Lions Gate, \$19.98] Release date: Aug. 8

We're sure many of the folks who attended Comic-Con last month are eagerly anticipating this release which marks the second animated chapter in the collaboration between Marvel and Lions Gate. Directed by Curt Geda and Steven E. Gordon, this 73-minute stand-alone movie finds our band of superheroes (Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Gi-



ant Man, Wasp and The Incredible Hulk) in Africa, as they come to the aid of a young king known as the Black Panther in his fight against vicious alien invaders. It's a great yarn featuring the characters created by Bryan Hitch, Stan Lee and Mark Millar. And if you miss it on DVD, you can always catch its cable premiere on Cartoon Network this fall.

Magilla Gorilla: The Complete Series [Warner Bros. \$44.98] Hong Kong Phooey; [Warner Bros. \$26.98] Release date: Aug. 15

The arrival of two golden oldies from the Hanna-Barbera vault should put a big smile on collectors' faces this month. *Hong Kong Phooey* (lead was voiced by the amazing Scatman Crothers) delighted Saturday morning audiences for only 16 episodes (it first aired in 1974 on ABC), but the goofy martial arts hero (a.k.a. #1 Superguy) won a place in our hearts instantly. A great documentary about the show's development and legacy, production stills, original art work and interviews with folks involved with the show are included in the 2-disc



package.

Many Baby Boomers have fond memories of that happy-go-lucky Magilla Gorilla and the cute little girl (Ogie) who was always trying to buy him from the pet store. Let's hear it for the folks at Warner Bros. Home Video who have released all 31 episodes of *Magilla Gorilla* on DVD. First introduced in 1964, the show featured the voices of Allan Melvin and Howard Morris. Also included are ten episodes of *Ricochet Rabbit & Droop-a-Long* and 24 segments of *Punkin' Pus & Mushmouse*, a black-and-white documentary about the making of the toon (which captures the newly finished Hanna-Barbera studio at 3400 Cahuenga Blvd in Hollywood) and interviews with Melvin and layout artist and character designer Jerry Eisenberg. Now this is what toon dreams are made of!

The Tick: 10th Anniversary Edition [Disney, \$34.99] Aug. 29

He's square-jawed, wears a tight blue body suit and fights crime in his own special way. No, we're not talking about Superman. We are referring to *The Tick*, Ben Edlund's much-loved spoof of all superheroes, which inspired a hit Fox Saturday morning animated series for three glorious seasons (1994-1997). This new (belated) 10th anniversary release features 12 episodes from the first season—"The Tick vs. The Mole Man" episode is not included because of creative and/or legal issues. Featuring the voices of Townsend Coleman, Micky Dolenz and Rob Paulsen, this offering from the TV gods should keep us happy for a while, until we get all three seasons in one package. That's when fans will chant "Spooooon!" in unison. ■



Welcome to the Boston CG Party!

A smorgasbord of animated and vfx delights will greet the attendees of this year's 36th Edition of SIGGRAPH. **by Ramin Zahed**



Terrence Masson

Forget about visiting Faneuil Hall, riding those swan boats in the Public Garden or following in the footsteps of Paul Revere on the Freedom Trail. If you're a CG animation enthusiast or professional, Boston, Massachusetts' biggest attraction is the annual SIGGRAPH confab (Aug. 1-3) at the city's newly opened Convention & Exhibition Center this summer. A glorious collection of sophisticated CG-animated screenings and info-packed panels on the state of the industry are only a few of the reasons to put up with the heat and humidity of Beantown, U.S.A.. The organizers have even prepared the world's largest Etch A Sketch installation (that's 35 ft by 25 ft), courtesy of The Ohio Art Company, to keep audiences entertained before the curtain rises on the Computer Animation Festival at the Electronic Theater.

According to Terrence Masson, the Computer Animation Festival Chair, fans can expect to see a higher level of quality across the board. "The overall quality level in submissions was to the roof," says Masson, the founder of Digital Fauxtography Inc. "We had a really aggressive outreach campaign that resulted in a record number of sub-

missions. We were all very impressed by the outstanding quality of student projects this year."

The Animation Festival features 97 films and videos by some of the world's top scientists, animators, VFX artists, educators, studios and students. SIGGRAPH received 726 submissions this year (up more than 125 from the 2006 edition). The Special Jury Honor was given to German Filmakademie Baben-Wurtemberg's Jan Bitzer, Ilija Brunk and Tom Weber's student film *458nm*, and the Best of Show prize was awarded to Alex Weil's acclaimed *One Rat Short*, which was produced at the New York-based studio Charlex (see story on page 18).

Some of the other Electronic Theater titles that have already generated good word of mouth this year: Mark Andrews and Andrew Jimenez's Oscar-nominated Pixar short *One Man Band*, Marco Nguyen, Pierre Perifel, Xavier Ramonede, Olivier Staphylas and Remi Zaarour's *The Building*, Marie Hyon and Marco Spier's *Bubble Girl*, Heebok Lee's *Tread Softly* and Agnieszka Kruczek's *Wojna*. Noted shorts playing at the Animation Festival are Henry Selick's *Moongirl*,



Wojna



The Building



Kungfu Gecko



One Man Band

SIGGRAPH 2006

Nickson Fong's *Kungfu Gecko*, Alaster Graham's *Suba*, Alex Wilkie's *Beloved*, Nicholas Lombardo's *The Aeronaut*, Piotr Karwas' *Do Robots Dream of Bunnies?*, Cristobal Vila's *Snakes*, and Sylvain Marc's *Fertilizer*.

Attendees who like their eye candy big, wide and sharp will be in digital heaven as all the Electronic Theater offerings are seen on the large-format main screen using the new Sony SRX-R1110 4K digital cinema projector and top-of-the-line audio via JBL 5.1 surround system. "Sony has donated this brand-new 4K digital projector (normal standard is 2K)," says Masson. "The viewing experience at the Grand Ballroom at the Convention Center (which seats 2,500) is going to be ideal."

As has become customary to this annual event, fx fans can all take in panels and how-did-they-do-that reels from Framestore (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Walking with Monsters*) Sony (*Monster House*, *Open Season*), IDT Entertainment (*Everyone's Hero*) and Weta Digital (*King Kong*).

Masson says the eclectic range of projects are a clear reflection of the program's eight judges and their outreach efforts: Larry Cuba (Iota Center), Bill Polson (Pixar), Moto Sakakibara (Sprite Animation), Jodie Jenkinson (University of Toronto), Ed Kramer (ILM), Glenn Robbins (Newtonic), Thomas Haegele (Filmakademie) and Dan Krech (DKP).

When asked to compare the 2006 submissions to previous years, Masson says he was really impressed with the quality of work sent in from Europe. "The projects sent to us from the students at France's Gobelins L'Ecole de L'Image and Germany's Filmakademie were really outstanding. I believe we have six from Gobelins and eight from Filmakademie. I've always had

a high regard for the European aesthetic. The thing is the European students don't have Hollywood and Pixar's baggage. Until now, American programs have been too commercialized. We're

on the tail end of that kind of golden hiring era. About eight years ago, because of the boom in the industry, most of our schools started seeing these huge dollar signs and began to admit students without doing portfolio reviews. Because they let anyone who could afford the tuitions, it watered down the quality of the student work."

Masson also believes that we've seen such amazing vfx work from the studios in the past couple of decades, that it's become easy to take their handiwork for granted. "The bar has been set so high for so long, that today it takes a lot more to stand out," he notes. "That's why we turned down the majority of vfx work from the studios, because we'd seen it all before. We did include Weta's reel from *King Kong* and ILM's *Harry Potter* package as well as Cinesite's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*."

Overall, certain sense of optimism about the future of computer animation and visual effects can be gathered from all the screenings and presentations. "Yes, the field is more competitive than ever, but people are taking chances and not afraid to go into new art directions, brave new looks and storylines."

As this year's chair, John Finnegan, associate professor of computer graphics technology at Purdue University points out, "Because the event is in Boston, our promotional catch-phrase is 'Join the revolution.' It's not a passive experience. We don't want anyone in our industry to become complacent of the current tool-sets and its uses. We are inviting everyone to start looking at new ways to enhance and facilitate a better quality of life for everyone. It's a mini-call to action to create a mini-computer revolution for the next decade!" ■

For more info, visit
www.siggraph.org/s2006



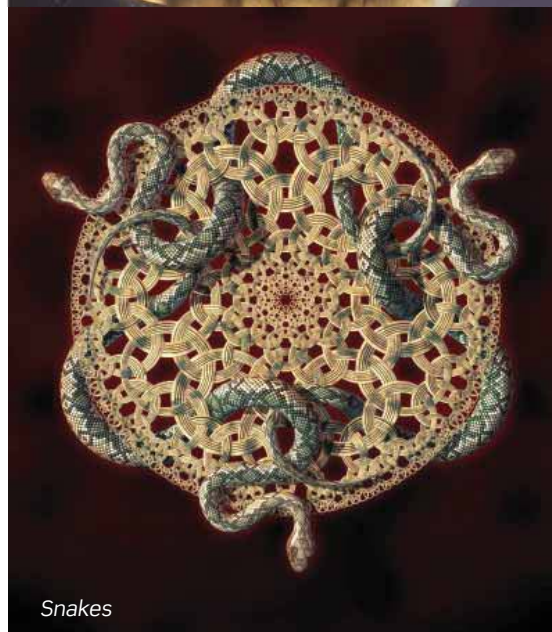
Beloved



The Aeronaut



Moongirl



Snakes

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Max and Maya: After the Marriage

What happens when fierce rivals become siblings?

For years, the biggest rivalry in the computer animation world was the one between Autodesk's 3D Studio Max (3ds Max) and Alias' Maya. Then, in October of 2005, Autodesk rocked the industry when it announced that it was acquiring Alias for \$182 million, bringing both company's products under one roof known as Autodesk Media and Entertainment.

"Obviously, you bring two strong packages like 3ds Max and Maya under the same company and there are going to be a lot of questions raised," notes Kevin Tureski, engineering director for Maya software at Autodesk. "The core roadmaps for the products are unchanged. If anything, they're improved since the acquisition. They're strong products and we'll continue to invest in both of them."

The roadmaps Tureski speaks of are three-year plans that were laid out for 3ds Max and Maya even before the acquisition. Autodesk has committed to keeping both products on those development tracks with the same teams still in place. One program the Maya crew is taking advantage of is myfeedback.com, a mechanism that Autodesk has had

in place for its beta customers. Tureski says user input has been highly instrumental in completing Maya 8, which is debuting at SIGGRAPH along with 3ds Max 9. "With each package, we really want to be driven by what our customers say," he remarks. "It's one thing that I think Alias has brought to Autodesk.



Gran Turismo

We have a pretty good track record of running advisory councils with high-end studios, whether it be in the games market or the film market. We're good at getting the right people in the room and listening very carefully to them, and Autodesk has really tried to pick our brains to use that best practice and



Kevin Tureski

expand upon it."

According to Tureski, the thing users have been clamoring for the most is interoperability between the two packages, since many studios use both. The FBX technology, which came with Alias' acquisition of Kyadara, is key to that interoperability, which extends beyond the 3D realm to Autodesk's 2D products such as Toxik and Flame.

Another thing Max and Maya users are looking for is more help with handling large amounts of data and overall scene complexity. On the day we spoke with Tureski, for example, a member of the Polyphony team of Sony in Japan was in house talking about the challenges he and his team are facing as they work on *Gran Turismo HD* for PlayStation 3.

"One of the things that is really exciting to me is all the interesting stuff that is happening at the grassroots level," says Tureski. "There are always interesting products popping out of nowhere and stuff like that keeps us on our toes. The Duncan Brinsmead, Jos Stams and Michael Girards are all really busy and you're going to see some really cool [stuff] come SIGGRAPH. There's all kinds of innovation happening out there in the rest of the world and it's great to see it. I encourage it. It's just a fun industry to be in."

—Ryan Ball

Random Tech Notes

Our friends at India's **Toonz Animation** tell us that the company has recently been working with entertainment power players such as Marvel, Hasbro and Paramount to produce top-notch quality animation for international distribution. "Our reputation of always delivering on time and exceeding expectations of quality is paying off," says CEO **P. Jayakumar**. "The fact that we are able to offer a repertoire of services, including development and pre-production in Los Angeles, has given us a leg up in a competitive market."

Based in the city of Technopark, Trivandrum, in the lush green landscapes of the Kerala region, Toonz was founded in 1999. The facility is staffed with top creative professionals from across the world, including the Philippines, Singapore, Canada, U.S. and India.



P. Jayakumar



Tommy and Oscar

In recent months, Toonz has strengthened its distribution and licensing arm and is also selling its original properties overseas. The studio also boasts the largest Toon Boom Harmony installation in India. Preparing for the production of several in-house projects, Toonz is planning to explore Harmony's capabilities to create traditional and cut-out animation in a fully integrated production pipeline. Marvel's *Wolverine* series, Paramount's *Dragonlace*, Rainbow's *Tommy and Oscar* and Hallmark's *Finley the Fire Engine* are some of the studio's high-profile projects. **For more info, visit www.toonzanimationindia.com**

Academy of Art will have a major presence at the Boston Convention Hall. In addition to offering online class demos and portfolio reviews, Lourdes Livingstone, director of MFA Computer Arts, New Media will be a judge for the international student interactive competition. The school's exhibit hall booth (#1723) will showcase student work from 12 different areas of art and design. (www.academyart.edu)



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If you are a hands-on CG whiz or just a casual weekend user, you may want to catch **BOXX's** showcase of its new **3DBOXX 8300 Series Workstation** (booth # 1523). This dy-no-mite super-workstation leverages the power of Intel's latest Dual-Core Xeon processor technology with workstation-level graphics and I/O. BOXX will also be presenting its APEXX 4 and APEXX 8, a powerful new system capable of handling 2K and 4K film, which combines the power to work in real-time on huge files (up to 128 GB of memory) with the performance of 16 processing cores in a quiet, versatile system. (www.boxxtech.com)

Boston-based integrated effects tech developer **Borix FX** will be showing off its real-time 3D motion graphics solution **Boris Blue** at the confab (stand#2525). Based on Boris Red, Blue takes 3D to the next level and addresses the needs of video editors and compositors who want to create dazzling 3D looks for their projects without these nasty learning curve and render time



associated with 3D apps. The product is priced at \$1,995 (\$3,495 bundled with NVIDIA Quadro FX 4500). (www.borixfx.com)

DQ Entertainment is sending its VP of technical and some key creative officers to Siggraph this year. The Hyderabad-based 2d and CG cartoon house is expanding its gaming division and aiming to deliver its first game for consoles by the end of 2001, which is a game based on the popular *Skyland* animated series. (www.dqentertainment.com)



If you're in the market for a new natural 3D environment solution, then you may want to stop by the **e-on software** booth (#1828). The Oregon-based developer is previewing the new **Vue 6** Aug. 1-3 at the confab. "With the new EcoSystem Generation II technology, we're pushing the limits of natural 3D environment creation even further," the company rep tells us. You can watch an early bird animation done with a pre-beta version of Vue 6 Infitte at www.e-onsoftware.com/vue6.



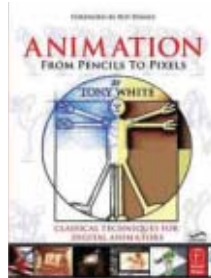
www.animationmagazine.net

D2 Software (a subsidiary of Digital Domain) will also have a visible presence at the event, introducing its new version of the compositing software **NUKE**, slated for release in December. Attendees can get hands-on demonstration of the software at booth #1231. Fans can also see how Digital Domain created shots for *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* and how DNA used NUKE to handle lighting and compositing for *The Ant Bully*. As Carl Stork, newly appointed CEO of Digital Domain points out, "NUKE is the product of a working production environment and will continue to advance to help compositors stretch creative limits and overcome deadline constraints of high-end visual effects." (www.d2software.com)



Rendering CAD models can be one of the most time-consuming and challenging tasks. That's why it's a good to know that **nPower Software** (a division of IntegrityWave) is bringing the new solution **Power Translators Pro** to the event. The system maximizes the design visualizations throughout by leveraging computing power and network optimization. The Pro model is an extension to nPower Software's Translators plug-in for 3ds Max. (npowersoftware.com)

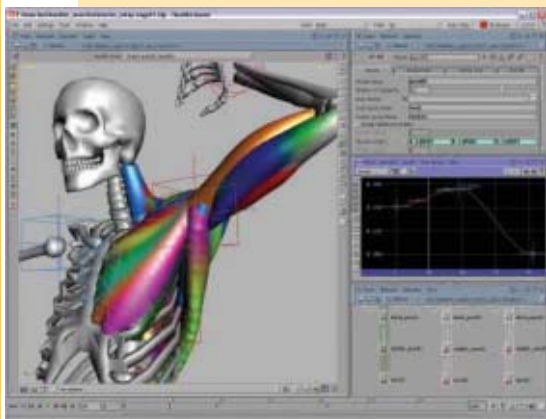
With all the digital gizmos and CG tools on display, it's a good thing that **Focal Press** is offering seven awesome new titles about using these products. *Digital Compositing for Film and Video*, *Creative After Effects 7*, *Animation: The Mechanics of Motion*, *Animation from Pencil to Pixels*, *Flash 3D*, *Animating with Flash 8* and *Understanding Flash M X* will all be available for perusal at Siggraph. (www.focalpress.com)



The 3D boffins over at **Side Effects Software** will be making the trek to Boston all the way from their Toronto offices to glimpse new technology, visit with clients and show off some of the new CG tricks they have up their sleeves. Be sure to stop by their booth and check out the latest addition to the award-winning Houdini family, the public beta of **Houdini 8.1**. This version features animating treats such as an artist-friendly Auto Rig, Muscle System, Character Picker, Pose Library and enhancements on the Rigid Body and Wire dynamic solvers. C.O.R.E. Feature Animation recently gave a splendid dose of CG a la Houdini with their work



on Disney's *The Wild* and now the folks at Side Effects are giving you the chance to try your hand at the new version for free! Right now, artists from around the world can download Houdini 8.1 public beta for free on www.sidefx.com as part of the Houdini Apprentice Program.



For Missouri-based particle effects software developer **wondertouch**, this year's SIGGRAPH will mark the company's exhibition debut on the East coast. And they plan to make a fine first showing in the East with pro demonstrations of their particlellusion software tools, including the recently released **Pro Emitters** for **particlellusion 3.0**. The Pro Emitters for 3.0 is a top-notch collection of six particle effects libraries featuring 180 emitters that cover themes like auras, explosions, breaking glass, motion graphics, artistic backgrounds and text, and abstract effects. wondertouch will also announce their plans for the future availability of a universal binary version of particlellusion that will provide enhanced compatibility to customers using new Intel-based Macs. Make your way to booth #606 at the confab and get in touch with president Alan Lorence and his powerful, user-friendly software. (www.wondertouch.com)

VICON's team is coming to the big show more united than ever. The motion-capture masters have just consolidated all of their entertainment business at a single hot spot in L.A. with the hardware, software and motion capture service crews rubbing elbows. Now the production pros from the House of Moves division and the tech-minded chaps from VICON can pool their brainpower and experience. This move has facilitated increased production of new hardware and software so SIGGRAPH attendees can look forward to the unveiling of some fresh mo-cap bells and whistles including a new MX model camera, high-power near infrared strobes, MX ultranet connectivity and completely lead-free circuitry. (www.vicon.com)





Sony Spills Open Season's CG Secrets

by Ellen Wolff

On SIGGRAPH's opening Sunday, early risers can ease into the CG fest by attending the morning course on the upcoming computer-animated feature *Open Season*. This sneak peek at Sony Pictures Animation's first feature (which opens September 29) is being presented by the Sony Imageworks team that supplied the 3D know-how.

In fact, it was SPI Visual Effects Supervisor Doug Ikeler who titled the course "Traditional 2D Styling With Today's Bells And Whistles." Ikeler, who has both a 2D background (*The Prince of Egypt*) and 3D expertise (*The Haunted Mansion*) explains that the challenge was to translate 2D artwork into a 3D world.

Ikeler wrote and will moderate the course, which was organized by Sande Scoredos, SPI's executive director of technical training and artist development. She notes that lecturers will be "Darren Lurie, the CG supervisor on effects and environments; Max Bruce, the supervisor on lighting and look development; and animation supervisor Sean Mullen. We'll start from the beginning—from what the artwork looked like, to how the final shots came out."

According to Scoredos, the course will examine how the team built tools to do squash and stretch in 3D. "Even though Sony developed hair and fur for *Stuart Little*, those things behave differently when you apply squash and stretch," she adds. That's crucial for a movie starring deer and bears.

Ikeler will recount the experimentation that it took to preserve the look of artist Eyvind Earle's original paintings, but still use 3D's bells and whistles. As he puts it, "Once you build a set you have the freedom to move the camera without having to re-draw." The film's directors—Roger Allers, Jill Culton and Anthony Stacchi—had varying degrees of 3D experience, and Ikeler recalls, "The hardest thing was coming up with a vocabulary that we all understood for putting paintings in three-space. 'Graphic' and 'Stylized' mean different things to different people." Consequently, adds Scoredos, "They came up with a Shape Language to talk about visual style."

Another key feature of the course will be insights into Sony's new Shaper System, used for the first time on *Open Season*.

The system, which is applied after 3D keyframe animation is completed, permits editing a character's contour. Animators can go in and pull points to get a stronger toon pose. "The breakthrough idea," notes Ikeler, "was to do this as a post process, shaping only points where needed. It allowed people to work the way they're used to. We trained classical animators on this system in a month."

A prominent feature of *Open Season* is raging water, and Sony's course will talk about the new fluid dynamics solver developed for the film by Dave Stevens. "He also

wrote a wave and splash system and a character interaction system," says Ikeler. "It's really efficient. We turned around 3 or 4 fluid sims a day, which is really fast. This is my fourth movie doing water effects, and I know that if you stylize the motion, it looks like goo, not water. We rendered this water to look stylized, but the underlying structure is realistic."

Each character and prop was lit and rendered separately, so when it came to compositing, recalls Ikeler, "We could do comp iterations quickly, instead of re-rendering. Every shot was an individual painting that we could tweak."

Perhaps the most informative behind-the-scenes aspect of this course is that it extensively examines the "build" of shots. Ikeler remarks, "We're going to take our sets and stitch them in three-space and then take different shots and stitch them together with one fluid camera, so you're essentially 'eavesdropping' on each shot as it takes place—but from a completely different camera. It gives away that the sets were dressed only where the camera would see them."

Despite all these 2D developments *Open Season* relied on the usual SPI pipeline, which is Maya and proprietary plug-ins. So there's a commonality that Scoredos thinks the 3D SIGGRAPH audience will find interesting. "This audience probably tends to think that people work in one arena or the other. Because we do different styles of animation, people have a chance to do different things. It's a new way of thinking." ■



Darren Lurie



Doug Ikeler



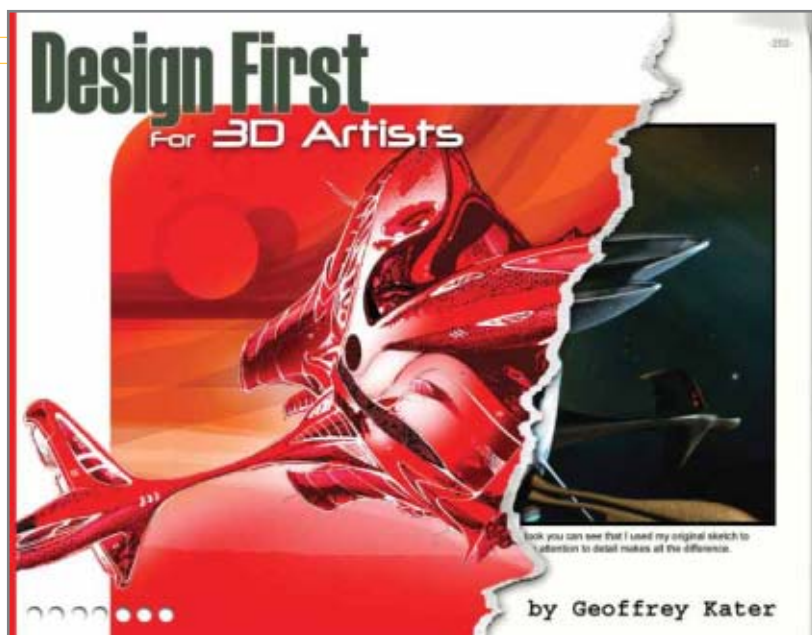
Max Bruce



Sande Scoredos



Sean Mullen



Back To The Drawing Board

by Ellen Wolff

At a time when many students approach 3D animation by starting with software tutorials, Producer/Director Geoffrey Kater has a forthright message: Learn design first. As co-founder of the Hollywood animation and effects boutique S4 Studios, Kater recalls meeting many computer-skilled 3D artists who didn't know how to design a shot with individuality. "I found it odd that in a field where the final product is visual, they didn't possess the fundamental skills to sketch a design for a shot."

So Kater has written *Design First for 3D Artists* (Wordware Publishing) which takes a step-by-step approach to the problem solving process behind good design. "The first half covers design fundamentals and the second half lays out a pipeline for a basic project. I forced myself to create a simple project from scratch because I believe in teaching through example."

Kater even wrote a script segment to show how artists break down a script and turn it into storyboards. He also demonstrates how drawing storyboards teach-

es an artist about camera angles and the placement of lights. The design process, he observes, "is about offering an aesthetic solution to what your script requires."

Kater brought some teaching experience to writing this book, having been a lecturer at The Art Institute in Santa Monica, Calif., and for the distance learning enterprise Acme Animation. That background, coupled with the daily challenges of working in animation and effects, gives him a perspective that many teachers don't have. "Running a shop keeps me constantly in touch with what's happening in the field."

It was while working on a 3D character



Dan Quarnstrom



Geoffrey Kanter

commercial that Kater met Rhythm & Hues animator Dan Quarnstrom, who wrote the forward for *Design First for 3D Artists*. Since both were graduates of California's famed Art Center, they shared similar backgrounds and became friends. So when Kater sought an expert to review technical aspects of 3D animation in his book, he turned to Dan. "His insights about 3D anima-

tion kept me on track."

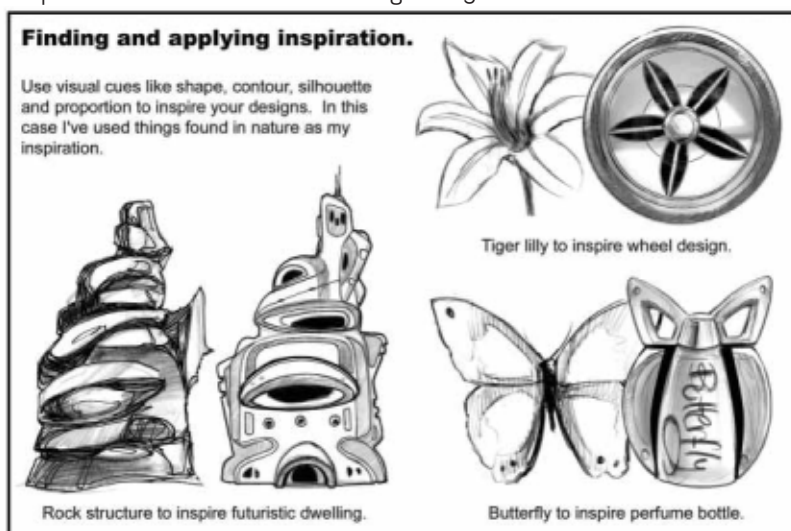
Quarnstrom, who's now at Sony Animation, observes, "Geoff is very thorough in laying down a template for people to follow. Design is an all-encompassing thing, but he's broken it down into bite-sized pieces. He's included all the touchstones that working animators are familiar with as they break down a script and move on to storyboards and then modeling and animation. This book goes a long way toward demystifying this really complicated discipline."

Design First for 3D Artists also contains a CD with additional images and a link to a support website, and Kater notes, "My biggest goal is to move into different media." He plans on shooting a series of *Design First* DVDs that will cover prop design, character design, and other aspects of what he envisions as an integrated curriculum. Kater has already been ap-

proached to give workshops based on his book, and teacher workshops are also part of his plan.

"You don't have to be the best illustrator to be a great storyteller," Kater concludes. "But you really need to understand what design means to the story you're trying to tell." ■

For more info, visit www.designfirst-for3d.com.



2006 SIGGRAPH Digital Resource Guide:

Last month, *Animation Magazine* sent out a global call for information about companies providing digital service work to their clients worldwide. What follows is a selective compilation of all the responses we received. If you'd like to be included next time we put together a similar guide, please email edit@animationmagazine.net.

Company Name: 3Dconnexion, Inc. (A Logitech Company)
Website: www.3dx.com/gd
Phone Number: 408-3706-2500
Contact Name: Linda Jacobson

Company Name: 4.21 Productions
Website: www.quatre21.com
Phone Number: + 33 (0)-1-44-67-84-84
Contact Name: Raoul and Pascal Gayrard
Recent Projects and Clients: Lego (Flash Games), Le Studio Productions (Advertising), PM Pub (Advertising and animation project in development), Kayenta Production (Ça Cartoon - Le Laboratoire du Gag), Cartoon Network (bumpers).

Company Name: Academy of Art University
Website: www.academyart.edu
Phone Number: 1-800-544-ARTS

Company Name: Animal Logic
Website: www.animallogic.com
Phone Number: +61-2-9383-4800
Contact Name: Anna Hildebrandt

Recent Projects and Clients: Feature film: *Happy Feet*, *World Trade Center*, 300. Commercials: Verizon Mercy, *Stage Dive* and *Extreme Soccer*; Adidas *What's Inside*; Foster's Australia *Big Ad*; Toohey's *War of the Appliances*.

Company Name: ANIMALADA 3D Animation Studio
Website: www.animalada.com
Phone Number: +598-2-402-9902
Contact Name: Flavio Caiafa
Recent Projects and Clients: *Big Shot!* (The first property ever featuring soccer in 3D plus some very crazy plays), *Loco Loco*

Mosquito video clip (Published by Universal), *Moco Gross*, *The Gross Side of Your Mobile*

Company Name: Animation Mentor
Website: www.animationmentor.com
Phone Number: 510-809-1177
Contact Name: Suzanne Francois - ext. 33, Luis Guillen - ext. 25

Company Name: The Art Institute of Phoenix
Website: www.aipx.edu
Phone: 602-331-7500 or toll-free 800-474-2479
Contact Name: Amy La Sala Smith
Recent Projects and Clients: Students at The Art Institute of Phoenix partner with ASU to create a campaign, website and PSA for NASA Mean's Business.

Company Name: Artifex Studios
Website: www.artifexstudios.com
Phone Number: 604-683-5333
Contact Name: Roula Lainas, Adam Stern
Recent Projects and Clients: *Eve and the Fire Horse*, Independent film - Official Selection - Sundance. Producers: Golden Horse Productions. Currently working on *Pathfinder* feature for 20th Century Fox, *Jetstream*: series for Paperny Films and Discovery Channel, *Wildfires*: movie of the week for A&E.

Company Name: ATI Technologies Inc.
Website: www.ati.com/FireGL
Phone Number: 905-882-2600

Company Name: Avikoo Studios
Website: www.avikoo.com
Phone Number: +52-55- 3004-

4043
Contact Name: Mauricio De la Orta
Recent Projects and Clients: Avikoo is currently working on a CG animated feature film named *Manu's Adventure*.

Company Name: The Bakshi School of Animation and Cartooning and Bakshi School Studio
Website: www.thebakshischool.com (under construction), www.thebakshischoolonline.com
Phone Number: 505-535-4548
Contact Name: Edward Bakshi (eddie@thebakshischool.com) or Jess Gorell (jess@thebakshischool.com)

Recent Projects and Clients: Several student films, work on an animated commercial for public television and in-production on Ralph Bakshi's feature *Last Days of Coney Island*.

Company Name: Berlin Productions
Website: www.berlinproductions.com
Phone Number: 914-683-5759
Contact Name: Steven Klapow
Recent Projects and Clients: Nice-Pak Products, *The Adventures of Cora & Cory*, Columbia University School of Social Work, *I Hear What You're Sayin'*, Kraft Foods, Snapple, GHI.

Company Name: Boris FX
Website: www.borisfx.com
Phone Number: 617-451-9900
Contact Name: Victoria Mui
Recent Projects and Clients: Client Story: www.borisfx.com/stories/archives/oakley_blue.php.

Company Name: BOXX Technologies
Website: www.boxxtech.com
Phone Number: 512-835-0400
Contact Name: Francois Wolf
Recent Projects and clients: BOXX Workstations were used by freelance compositor, Lee Roderick, to complete the majority of visual effects elements produced for *HOOT*. BOXX Workstations were also used by Rainmaker, an award-winning vfx, 3D animation and post-production company, to complete a number of vfx elements the company produced for *The Da Vinci Code*.

Company Name: BRB Internacional
Website: www.brb.es
Phone Number: + 34-91-77-11-400
Contact Name: Carlos Biern
Recent Projects and Clients: *Iron Kid* (Manga Entertainment/IDT, TVE, Jetix), *Bernard* (M6, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Jetix, Mediaset, CBBC), *The Invisible Man* (M6, Disney Channel, RAI, Antena 3).

Company Name: BreakThru Films
Website: www.breakthrufilms.co.uk
Phone Number: +44 (0) 207-580-3688
Fax: +44 (0) 207-580-4445
Contact Name: Tamsin Lyons
Recent Projects: Visual FX for *La Vie En Rose* for Legende/ Timothy Burrill, 2006; *Peter & the Wolf*, 2006; *Planet of the Winds*, 2007.

Company Name: Brickyard VFX
Website: www.brickyardvfx.com
Phone Number: Pacific: 310-453-

5722; Atlantic: 617-262-3220
Contact Names: Jay Lichtman and Diana Young (Brickyard VFX Pacific); Kirsten Andersen and Brian Drewes (Brickyard VFX Atlantic)
Recent Projects and Clients: Electronic Arts/Arnson Communications (3D animated promo for EA's E3 Video Wall); Mobile ESPN (CG-heavy *Sports Heaven* Super Bowl ads); AT&T Winter Olympics spots; Comcast *Turtles* campaign; Farmer's Insurance (*Indestructible* film-like car chase); VISA (*Worm/Recycling* spot with animated flipbook)

Company Name: Cartoonland
Website: <http://cartoonlandanimation.com>
Phone Number: 415-387-2844

Contact Name: Kevin Coffey
Recent Projects and Clients: Animated training and sales films for Nextel, United States Post Office. Animation for Fox Kids London.

Company Name: Chaotic Unicorn
Website: <http://chaoticunicorn.com/>
Phone Number: 917-806-5582
Contact Name: Euralis Weekes
Recent Projects and Clients: Nickelodeon, Curious Pictures, Nicktoons, JVC.

Company Name: Collins College
Website: www.collinscollege.edu
Phone Number: 480-446-1252
Contact Name: Amy Juneau

Company Name: Color Chips India Limited
Website: www.colorchipsindia.com
Phone Number: +91-40-23550268, 23544862/3/4
Contact Name: Mr. Sudhish Rambhotla - cChairman & managing director
Recent Projects and Clients: Just concluded 26 half-hour episodes of *Legend of the Dragon* for BKN Kids and currently working on a 13 episode series for Penta TV, Germany.

Company Name: Concrete Pictures
Website: www.concretepictures.com
Phone Number: 610-668-8664
Contact Name: Jeff Boortz, president
Recent Projects and Clients: CBS Sports; Travel Channel; Discovery Channel; Scripps Networks' Video On Demand (VOD).

Company Name: CritterPix
Website: www.critterpix.com
Phone Number: 415-479-1685
Contact Name: Karen Moore
Recent Projects and Clients: *Hollywood Vermin* (feature for release in 2008).

Company Name: Digital Domain
Website: www.digitaldomain.com
Phone Number: 310-314-2800
Contact Name: Dominick Spina, Product Manager D2 Software, and C. Bradley Call, President and COO, Digital Domain
Recent Projects and Clients: (Film) *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*; *The Return of Zoom*; *Flags of Our Fathers*; *Aeon Flux*; *I, Robot*; *Stealth*; (Commercial) *Budweiser Superfan*; *Motorola Pebl*; *Heineken Beer Run*; *Nine Inch Nails Only*; *Disney Coming Home*.

Company Name: Digital Dreams Company Limited
Website: www.digitaldreamsintl.com
Phone Number: +852-2543-8669
Contact Name: Ms. Anne Szeto
Recent Projects and Clients: Working on own production, *The Primitives*, a 2-min 50 episodes 2D animation to be released early next year and is securing distribution rights in Europe, USA and Canada.

Company Name: Digital-Tutors
Website: www.digitaltutors.com
Phone Number: 405-603-2271
Contact Name: Sandip Patel
Recent Projects and Clients: Interactive training for emerging digital artists. Clients include artists from studios such as Pixar, Walt Disney, Digital Domain, Weta Digital, The Mill, Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, MTV, DNA, Nickelodeon, NASA and General Motors.

Company Name: Double Negative
Website: www.dneg.com
Phone Number: +44 (0)20-7534-4400
Contact Name: Alex Hope or Matt Holben
Recent Projects: *The Da Vinci Code*, *United 9*, *Flyboys*, *Gone*, *Stranger than Fiction*, *World Trade Center*, *The Reaping*, *Children of Men*, *The Magic Flute*, *Penelope*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *10,000 B.C.*, *Stardus*, *Hot Fuzz*, *Atonement*.

Company Name: DQ Entertainment Limited, India
Website: www.dqentertainment.com
Phone Number: +91 40 23553726 / 27
Contact Name: Mr. Tapaas Chakravarti, Executive Producer and CEO, DQ Entertainment Ltd, India
Recent Projects and Clients: *Skyland* (3D), *And Yet it Moves*, *Pet Pals* (2D), *Donkey Ollie*, *Barbie Diaries* (3D), *Potatoes & Dragons* (2D), *Tutenstein* (2D), *Delta State* (FLASH), *Todd World* (FLASH), *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* (3D), *Rat Man* (2D), *Choose Your Own Adventure* (2D), *Gloria*, *Wilma & Me* (2D), *Jet Groove* (2D), *Curious George*, *Les Gnouf* (3D), *Mikido* (3D), *Iron Man* (3D), *Pinky & Perky* (3D), *Large Family* (2D), *Postcards from Buster* (2D & live action).

Company Name: DreamWorks Animation
Website: www.dreamworksanimation.com
Phone Number: 818-695-5000
Contact Name: Bob Feldman
Recent Projects and Clients: *Over The Hedge*, *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of The Were-Rabbit*, *Madagascar*, *Bee Movie*.

Company Name: DUCK Studios
Website: www.duckstudios.com
Phone Number: 310-478-0771
Contact Name: Mark Medernach, Exec. Producer
Recent Projects and Clients: *United Dragon*, *Cocoa Pebbles' The Great Cocoa Chase*, *Hershey's Kissables*.

Company Name: Earthworks Entertainment Inc.
Website: www.earthworksentertainment.com
Phone Number: 323-654-5134
Contact Name: Cathy Malatesta

Company Name: e-on software
Website: www.e-onsoftware.com
Phone Number: U.S. and Canada toll free: 866-3414-EON or +1 971-327-6008
Europe: +33-1-4314-2815
Contact Name: Matt Riveccie
Recent Projects and Clients: Industrial Light & Magic, Warner Bros., Sony Pictures ImageWorks, Walt Disney Pictures, Electronic Arts, Fox Television, NASA.

Company Name: Famous House Of Animation, Division of Famous Studios Ltd.
Website: www.famousanimation.com
Phone Number: +91 22 304 23131, 30423848-49
Contact Name: Mr. E. Suresh, Creative Director, suresh@famousanimation.com
Recent Projects and Clients: Ogilvy & Mather, J Walter Thompson, BBC World Service Trust, etc. A recent film for Levis titled *Slim Vs Slim* was

shortlisted in the finals at Cannes 2006. Other animation projects include work for television series, feature film and commercials.

Company Name: Focal Press

Website:

www.focalpress.com

Phone Number:

919-471-5628

Contact Name: Sheri Dean Allen, Sr. Publicity Manager

Recent Projects and Clients:

Digital Compositing for Film and Video, 2ed, Creative After Effects 7, Animation the Mechanics of Motion, Animation from Pencils to Pixels, Flash 3D (October pub date), Animating with Flash 8, Understanding Flash MX 2004 ActionScript 2.

Company Name: FrameFlow

Website:

www.frameflow.com

Phone Number:

310-341-0200

Contact Name: Hitesh Shah, CEO & CoFounder

Clients: Sony Pictures Imageworks, The Orphanage, Cinesite U.K., Third Wire.

Company Name: Funny az Hell

Animation

Website:

www.funnyazhellanimation.com

Phone Number:

+61 2 9211 8271

Contact Name: Stuart Cunningham

Recent Projects and Clients:

Master Raindrop (with EM.TV, Flux and Big Communications), *I Got a Rocket* (with Mike Young Productions and SLR Productions), *Chiko: Accidental Alien* (with Indigo Digital), *ToddWorld* (with Mike Young Productions).

Company Name: Global

Mechanic

Website: www.globalmechanic.com

Phone Number: 617-542-9111

Contact Name: Matthew Charde

Recent Projects and Clients:

Fetch with Ruff Ruffman-TV series for PBS, Nokia-TV commercial, Eggo-TV commercial campaign, *At the Quinte Hotel*-independent film.

Company Name: Gradient Effects

Website: www.gradientfx.com

Phone Number: 310-399-2542

Contact Name: Olcun

Tan/Thomas Tannenberger principals of Gradient Effects

Recent Projects and

Clients: Currently have two projects with Sony.

Company Name: greenlightjobs

Website:

www.greenlightjobs.com

Phone Number:

323-933-8609

Contact Name: Lisa Kaye, president

Recent Projects and Clients:

Annecy Animation Film Festival, Creative Focus Job Fair-Guest Speaker, Yahoo! Media Group, Fox Blue Sky Studios, Time Warner, Disney/ABC Media Networks Group, JetSet Studios.

Company Name: Home Run

Pictures

Website:

www.hrpictures.com

Phone Number:

412-391-8200

Contact Name: Tom Casey

Recent Projects and Clients:

The Discovery Channel, NASA, National Geographic, The Science Channel.

Company Name: Hybride

Website: www.hybride.com

Phone Number:

450-227-4245

Contact Name: Pierre Raymond

Recent Projects and Clients:

10:5 Apocalypse, Jaffe/Braunstein, Films Pearl Pictures 2005; *Maurice Richard*, Cinéma; *The Adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl in 3D*, Dimensions

Films/ Troublemaker Studios; *Sin City*, Dimensions Films / Troublemaker Studios Current: *Marie-Antoinette*, teleseries, Emergence International/GMT Productions; *Snakes on a Plane*, New Line Cinema; *300*, Warner Bros.

Company Name: Ideas to Go

Phone Number:

818-504-2690

Contact Name: Pamela

Thompson

Recent Projects and Clients:

Recruiting clients include Blue Sky Studios, Framstore, Digital Domain, Disney, Paramount, Macromedia. Also do career coaching specializing in the entertainment field.

Company Name: Image Metrics

Website: www.image-metrics.com

Phone Number: 213-489-8213

Contact Name: Michelle Mikoljak

Recent Projects and Clients:

Image Metrics current projects include *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* and the next upcoming *Grand Theft Auto* title, as well as several upcoming film projects.

Company Name: Ink.

Website:

www.inkanimations.com

Phone Number:

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+44-1328-388632

Contact Name: Martin Gornall

Recent Projects and Clients:

Provided digital fx for 35mm stop-motion feature *The Three Musketeers* in 2006, a U.K./

Danish/Latvian co-production.

Company Name: Insomniac Games, Inc.

Website: www.insomniacgames.com

Phone Number: 818-729-2400

Recent Projects and Clients:

Ratchet: Deadlocked (PS2), *Resistance: Fall of Man* (upcoming exclusive launch title for PS3).

Company Name: International Academy of Design & Technology | Tampa

Website: www.academy.edu

Phone Number: 813-881-0007

Contact Name: Ray Eales/Robb Epps (Department Chairs)

Company Name: The Jim Henson Company, Jim Henson's Creature Shop

Website: www.henson.com

Phone Number: 323-802-1500

Contact Name: Kerry Shea, Bret Nelson

Recent Projects and Clients:

The Muppets Wizard of Oz, 20th Century Fox Television, Touchstone Television; *Virtual Red Carpet*, Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, DICE 2006; *Nightmares and Dreamscapes: From the Stories of Stephen King: Battleground*, TNT.

Company Name: Loose Moose Ltd.

Website: www.loosemoose.net

Phone Number: +44 (0)207-287-3821

Contact Name: Glenn Holberton

Recent Projects and Clients:

Nabisco Chips Ahoy! & Foote Cone & Belding, NY, *Air Freshener* (Snack & Seal), *Fresh Picks* (Snack & Seal), *Punky* (Chunky Chips Ahoy!); Nabisco Chips Ahoy! for Bravo Group, NY, *Reggaeton* (Chunky Chips Ahoy!); Kellogg's Apple Jacks

2005 & 2006 for Leo Burnett, Chicago, *Time To Go*, *Showtime*, *Costume*, *Dream*, *Coconut*; Quaker Oats 2006 for Abbott Mead Vickers, London, *Windy's Day Off*, *Supergrain*, *Complaint*.

Company Name: Luxology LLC

Website: www.mod03d.com

Phone Number: 650-378-8506

Contact Name: Brad Peebler, president

Company Name: MAXON

Computer, Inc.

Website: www.maxon.net

Phone Number: 877-ANIMATE

(877-264-6283)

Contact Name: Diana Lee

Recent Projects and Clients:

Sony Pictures Imageworks, *Monster House* and *Open Season* used both CINEMA 4D and BodyPaint 3D. Digic Pictures, *Warhammer: Mark of Chaos* game cinematic used BodyPaint 3D.

Company Name: Mike Young Productions

Website: [www.](http://www.mikeyoungproductions.com)

mikeyoungproductions.com

Phone Number:

Main 818-999-0062

Contact Name: Delphine Pham,

Marketing Coordinator Online

Recent Projects and Clients:

Bratz for MGA Entertainment; *Chloe's Closet*, no co-producers yet; *Dive! Olly Dive!*, a co-production with KIKA and Yoram Gross; *El Corazon*, a co-production with Sun Woo; *Growing Up Creepie*, in association with Discovery Kids and DAG Entertainment; *I Got a Rocket*, a co-production with SLR, KIKA/Europool and Sun Woo; *Jakers! The Adventures of Piggley Winks* for Entara; *Mix Master*, a co-production with Sun Woo, KBS, and OMNI; *Pet Alien Season 2*, a co-production with TATA ELXSI, John Doze, KIKA/Europool, MoonScoop, Telegael Teoranta and CGCG; *Quantum Ray*, a co-production with KIKA/Europool, Method Films, Cosmotoons Inc.; *ToddWorld Season 2*, a co-

production with Discovery Kids, ToddWorld Inc, DQ Data Quest, Supertime Entertainment and Telegael Teoranta.

Company Name: Motion

Analysis Corporation

Website: www.motionanalysis.com

Phone Number: 707-579-6500

Contact Name: Rita Maloney

Recent Projects and Clients:

King Kong - WETA Digital, *Jane & The Dragon* - WETA Digital, StarJack TV - Virtual Entertainment Productions.

Company Name: Nad Centre

Website:

www.nadcentre.com

Phone Number:

1-514-288-3447

Contact Name: Alexandre

Renaud, corporate services manager, and Sandrine Brandner, customer service assistant

Company Name: NaturalMotion

Website: www.NaturalMotion.com

Phone Number: +44 (0) 1865-

250-575 or 415-867-9679

Contact Name: Richard Craig-McFeely

Recent Projects and Clients:

NaturalMotion euphoria being used for LucasArts' next-gen game, *Indiana Jones* (working title).

Company Name: NewTek

Website: www.newtek.com

Phone Number: 210-370-8000

Contact Name: Kurtis Harris - 3D, Paul Lara - Video

Recent Projects and Clients:

LightWave v9, 3D Arsenal, VT[5], TriCaster Pro, SpeedEDIT.

Company Name:

NextComputing

Website: www.nextcomputing.com

Phone Number: 603-886-3874

Contact Name: Laura P. Cooper

Recent Projects and Clients:

Recent projects include the incorporation of Dual Quadro FX 3500 boards

into the NextDimension, portable graphics engineering workstation.

Clients include Landmark Graphics, Paradigm Geo and BAE Systems.

Company Name: Nikitova

Games

Website: www.nikitova.com

Phone Number: 773-913-8015

Contact Name: Olya Nikitova

Recent Projects and Clients: EA games, EA sports, Humanhead, DICE, LucasArts, Midway, FunCom, Egosoft, Activision and others.

Company Name: nPower

Software

Website: www.nPowerSoftware.com

Phone Number:

858-592-8866

Contact Name: David Gill

Recent Projects and Clients:

Power NURBS + Power Translators Pro.

Company Name: O'Plenty Animation

Website: www.oplenty.com

Phone Number: 732-714-7517

Contact Name: Chris Larson, Ann Marie

Recent Projects and Clients:

The Dawn Patrol (Special Edition DVD), *Shockazooloo* (music video), *Baptism of Solitude* (IFC), Scholastic, Nintendo Gameboy, the Olsen twins, etc.

Company Name: Ocean Visual FX

Website: www.oceanvisualfx.com

Phone Number: 714-258-6678

Contact Name: Robbie Robfogel

Recent Projects and Clients:

Champion Sidecars, New Dimensions in Media, Rock Dawgz™ (development).

Company Name: The Orphanage

Website:

www.theorphanage.com

Phone Number: 415-561-2570

Contact Name: Rama

Dunayevich, director of public relations

Recent Projects and Clients:

Features: *Superman Returns* (Warner Bros.), *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Disney), *The Host* (Chungeorahm), *Pulse* (The Weinstein Company).
Commercials: Comcast (Goodby Silverstein), Dolby High Definition Sound trailer, Toshiba (Della Femina Rothschild Jeary), Benadryl (J. Walter Thompson).

Company Name: PhaseSpace Inc.

Website:

www.phasespace.com

Phone Number: 510-633-2865

Contact Name: Tracy McSheery

Recent Projects and Clients:

Origami, Nexus Digital Studios, Eden Entertainment.

Company Name: Piedmont Community College

Website : www.ncanimate.com

Phone Number: 336-694-5707

Contact Name: Paula Hindman

Company Name: Radium

Website: www.radium.com

Phone Number: 415-558-6900

Contact Name: Jeff Blodgett/
Dave Skaff/Katie Ward

Recent Projects and Clients:

Target (all CG) commercials, Gatorade, Volkswagen, GMC, Dove Night Webisodes, Oracle,

Missy Elliott *Lose Control* music video.

Company Name: Rhythm & Hues Studios

Website: www.rhythm.com

Phone Number: 310-448-7400

Contact Name: Lee Berger (film), Paul Babb (commercials), Stacy Burstin (design)

Recent Projects

and Clients: Recent

Films: *Superman Returns* (Warner Bros.), *The Fast & the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (Universal), *Garfield: Tale of Two Kitties* (Fox). Recent Commercials/
Broadcast: Crayola, Xbox *Fable 2* for E3, Toyota Camry, Ubisoft's

Splinter Cell for E3, Hartford NCAA Final Four, Chevy Tahoe, WalMart/*Over the Hedge*, Glade, Cox Communications, Superbowl 40 Intro.

Company Name: Ring of Fire

Website:

www.ringoffire.com

Phone Number: 323-966-5410

Contact Name: Amy Grgich, head of sales, John Myers, exec producer

Recent Projects and Clients:

Commercial projects: Nike, Lexus, Old Navy, NBC Winter Olympics branding, Target, Miller, Motorola, Starburst.

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Company Name:
Rubberductions
Website: www.rubberductions.com

Phone Number:
+44 0117 903 1104
Contact Name: Clarissa Maycock

Recent Projects and Clients:
Dude Corp- Our animated mobile media project, *Pimms* ads for Mother London (aired on ITV1 during the "Beckham's World Cup Party"), *Towel Talk* - the "Cannes 24hr Film Challenge" Winner, *Oedipus* - winner of the BBC New Filmmaker's Award, *Processed* - our animated amphibian adventure.

Company Name: **S4 Studios, LLC**
Website: www.s4studios.com
Phone Number: 323-466-3910
Contact Name: Larry Le Francis, Dale Hendrickson, Geoffrey Kater

Recent Projects and Clients:
Wild Animal Baby direct to DVD series; other clients include Cartoon Network, Rhythm & Hues commercials, Walt Disney Television Animation, Viacom, Warner Bros. and Winner & Associates.

Company Name: **S4 VFX**
Website: www.s4studios.com/s4vfxreel.htm

Phone Number: 323-466-3910
Contact Name: Geoffrey Kater
Recent Projects and Clients:
Projects: *Mi:3*, *King Kong*, *Scary Movie 4*, *Fantastic Four*, *The Omen*.
Clients: SSI Advanced Post, Flyer Entertainment, The Cimarron Group.

Company Name: **School of Communication Arts North Carolina**
Website: www.higherdigital.com
Phone Number: 919-488-8500
Contact Name: Robert Thornton

Company Name: **Side Effects Software**
Website: www.sidefx.com
Phone Number: 310-319-9876

Contact Name: Sarah Counnas
Recent Projects and Clients:
Recent Projects: *Superman Returns*, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, *The Wild*, *The Ant Bully*.
Recent Clients: Sony Pictures Imageworks, C.O.R.E., Rhythm and Hues, The Orphanage, Framestore CFC, DNA Productions, Digital Domain.

Company Name: **Sony Pictures Imageworks**
Website: www.imageworks.com
Phone Number: 310-840-8000
Contact Name: Rachel Falikoff
Recent Projects and Clients:
Open Season (Sony Pictures Animation), *Monster House* (Columbia Pictures), *Superman Returns* (Warner Bros.), *Click* (Columbia Pictures), *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Disney).

Company Name: **Spark**
Website: www.sparkcreativeinc.com
Phone Number: 310-586-1101
Contact Name: Elaine Cantwell, Founder
Recent Projects and Clients:
CourtTV, W Network Canada, A&E, Starz!, TNT, Televisa, Global TV and Tvtropolis.

Company Name: **Sprite Animation Studios**
Website: www.spritee.com
Phone Number: 310-641-7400
Contact Name: Grace McNamee
Recent Projects and clients:
Shorts-Monster Samurai, *Journey to the West*, Theatrical feature-GON (2008).

Company Name: **Technicolor**
Website: www.technicolor.com
Phone Number: 416-585-9995
Contact Name: Tom Sinnot, director of vfx and

Samara Melanson, business development executive
Recent Projects and Clients:
Capote, *The Producers*, *The Fountain*, *Littleman*, *The Banquet*, 300.

Company Name: **Tippett Studio**
Website: www.tippett.com
Phone Number: 510-649-9711
Contact Name: Lori Petrini, marketing and PR representative
Recent Projects and Clients:
Features: *The Shaggy Dog* (Disney), *Charlotte's Web* (Paramount), *Enchanted* (Disney), *Spiderwick Chronicles* (Paramount).
Commercials: Chevy Impala (Campbell-Ewald), Milka Chocolate Campaign (Ogilvy Frankfurt), Quaker State (Doner Detroit).

Company Name: **Toon Boom Animation Inc.**
Website: www.toonboom.com
Phone Number: 514-278-8666
Contact Name: Karina Bessoudo

Company Name: **Toonz Animation India Pvt.Ltd.**
Website: www.toonzanimationindia.com
Phone Number: 91-471-2700928
Contact Name: P.Jayakumar
Recent Projects and Clients:
Finley the Fire Truck- Hallmark Entertainment, *Freefonix*- BBC, *Panshell* - P&PM, France

Company Name: **Trace Animation**
Website: www.traceanimation.com
Phone Number: 434-984-4239
Contact Name: Mr. Fern Catta-Preta
Recent Projects and Clients:
Sperry Marine, USPS, Christ Episcopal Church, ACAC Fitness and Wellness, Preston Capital Management.

Company Name: **Turbo Squid**
Website: www.turbosquid.com
Phone Number: 504-680-4402
Contact Name: Stephanie Graf

Company Name: **UVPFACTORY**
Website: www.uvph.com
Phone Number: 212-483-0040
Contact Name: Brian Welsh
Recent Projects and Clients:
UVPH has attracted a diverse client base including AT&T, BET, Bravo, Cartoon Network, CBS, Cinemax, Cingular, Coca-Cola, Comedy Central, ESPN, FOX Sports, General Electric, HBO, IBM, IFC, Miramax, MTV, Nike, NBC, Scripps Networks, SCI FI Network, Showtime, USA, US Cellular, VH1, VOOM HD Network and many others.

Company Name: **Vicon**
Website: www.vicon.com
Phone Number: 949.472.9140/310.306.6131
Contact Name: Jon Damush

Company Name: **VICON House of Moves**
Website: www.moves.com
Phone Number: 310-306-6131
Contact Name: Scott Gagain
Recent Projects and Clients: Full performance capture for projects including *Pepsi Dancetron* (commercial spot, Method Studios), *Target Product People* (commercial campaign, Radium) *Guitar Hero* and *Guitar Hero 2* (video games, Harmonix); *Poseidon* (feature film, Warner Bros.); *Fight Science* (TV series, Base Productions and National Geographic Channel).

Company Name: **WAAAHOO Productions**
Website: www.WAAAHOO.com
Phone Number: 775-688-6278

Contact Name: Eileen Gay
Recent Projects and Clients:
Riverdeep/The Learning
Company: *Reader Rabbit*.

Company Name: Wacom
Technology Corp.
Website: www.wacom.com
Phone Number:
360-896-9833

Contact Name: Doug Little
Recent Projects and Clients:
Wacom's Cintiq 21UX
interactive pen display was
used in a variety of stages
to create the Disney/Pixar
animated film, *Cars*. In addition,
Skywalker Sound, responsible
for the audio elements of the
movie, used the Cintiq to mix
sound.

Company Name: Wild Child
Ent.
Website:
wildchildentertainment.com
Phone Number:
818-919-3898/ 512-916-0154
Contact Name:
Solomon Perry
Recent Projects and Clients:
Spike Lee *Sucker Free City* prop
design, set design Viacom TV,
animated titles and shorts
for various networks, toy
production for celebrities.

Company Name: wondertouch,
LLC
Website: www.wondertouch.com
Phone Number: 636-225-7861
Contact Name: Alan Lorence
Recent Projects and Clients:
wondertouch software's
cornerstone particle effects
application, particlellusion,
is used by creative artists
at leading facilities around
the world. Recent film
and broadcast projects
leveraging the software
include: *Battlestar Galactica*
(Zoic Studios), *Too Hot Not*
to Handle: A Global Warming

Primer (Extreme Digital
Productions) and *Superman*
Returns (Frantic Films).

Company Name: Zoic Studios
Website: www.zoicstudios.com
Phone Number: 310-838-0770
Contact Name: Steve

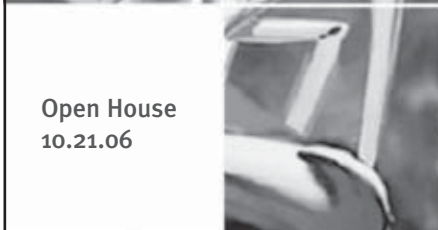
Scofield (executive producer
- commercials), Gina Fiore
(executive producer - episodic,
feature), Elexis Stearn (head of
sales)

Recent Projects and Clients:
Battlestar Galactica (Sci Fi), *CSI:*
Crime Investigation (CBS), *CSI:*

Miami (CBS), *Blade* (Spike TV),
Eureka (Sci Fi), *Tallegda Nights*
(Sony), *Pathfinder* (Phoenix
Pictures, FOX), *Prison Break*
(FOX), Direct TV (Deutsch),
Tcom (SEA), Long John Silvers
(Element 79). ■

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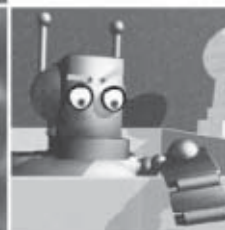
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Happy Birthday, Blue!

Nickelodeon's award-winning series *Blue's Clues* celebrates a decade of interactive preschool magic.

by Sarah Gurman

Nick Jr.'s *Blue's Clues* has held the position of one of the top five preschool series on commercial television throughout its ten-year existence. That's no mean feat considering the influx of preschool-targeted properties we've seen in the past few years. But there's just something irresistible about the world of Blue. To be more exact, there are several key ingredients in the mix that keep eager tots and their caregivers/parents coming back for more: the bright colors, the simple yet innovative visual style, the interactive format that encourages participation, and of course, the ever-lovable pup named Blue.

Created by Traci Paige Johnson and Angela C. Santomero, *Blue's Clues* was one of the first series to be animated entirely on Mac desktop computers. Traci Paige Johnson, who is also the show's director of design explains, "We knew we wanted to do something very simple, like a simple picture graphic look, like Eric Carle or Leo Lionni and we knew that we wanted it to feel tex-

tural so we were right at the cusp. A show had never been done on Macintosh before, commercials had been done, but because we wanted to have such a simple look, we did it."

Blue's Clues has branched out in many ways over the years in terms of look and content. However, every episode still revolves around the adorable pup expressing what she wants to do each day by marking three clues with her paw prints for the host Joe (Donovan Patton), and his helpful audience. Joe came on board in 2002 when the original host, his older brother Steve (Steven Burns), left to attend college. The transition to the new host went over well with fans, and is a prime example of how *Blue's Clues* has evolved with style during its long run.

"Steve and Joe are really different from one another," says Nickelodeon's executive creative director Brown Johnson. "I think there is something about how Steve spoke to kids at home. It was sort of quiet and funny, a very appealing persona—sort of more Fred Rogers than wacky



Angela C. Santomero



Traci Paige Johnson



Brown Johnson

guy. And I think Donovan as Joe brings something very physical, kind of goofy ... like a big brother. He dances more!"

2004 marked another major milestone for the series when Blue gained the ability to speak on the first *Blue's Room* primetime special, which also revealed the animated pooch in puppet form for the first time. "I think for kids at home, their greatest fantasy was to really talk to Blue," Brown Johnson says. "Although when she was just barking, I think that they thought they could understand her."

Preschoolers have indeed always felt a strong connection with Blue and her friends. Brown Johnson believes this is partly due to the show's ability to foster a high level of engagement with the viewer. "I think [they like] the whole idea of an adult like Steve or Joe asking a child to help" she says. "I think kids are so willing to help and like feeling like they can do something. And *Blue's Clues* not only asked them for help, but made them feel smart because we were teaching them at the same time."

In honor of a fabulous tail-wagging decade, Nickelodeon is throwing its favorite blue girl a proper party. On August 6, the network will premiere the hour-long primetime movie *Meet Blue's Baby Brother*, which will meld Joe and the animated world with the puppets from *Blue's Room* and introduce the newest member in Blue's family. The celebration will also include the unveiling of *Behind the Clues: 10 Years with Blue*, a 12-minute retrospective created by the makers of VH1's *Behind the Music*, in which the crew dishes about the show's creation, success and a touch of gossip (after all, this is coming from the makers of *Behind the Music*!). Hear's to Blue. She certainly has aged with grace. ■

Meet Blue's Baby Brother premieres at 10 a.m. on August 7 on Nick Jr. and at 2 p.m. on Noggin. Nick Jr.'s broadband video service (www.nickjr.com) streams *Behind the Clues: 10 Years with Blue* in August.

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Putting the Animated Pedal on the Metal

Brendon Small and Tommy Blacha's *Metalocalypse* brings a touch of *Spinal Tap*-style lunacy to [adult swim].

by Ramin Zahed

It's one of those inspired matches made in late-night animation heaven. Center a show on a crazy fictitious Norwegian heavy metal band called Dethklok, add original music and cutting-edge animation and watch the sparks fly for at least 20 glorious episodes. That's what fans can look forward to when *Metalocalypse* rocks on Cartoon Network's [adult swim] Saturday night lineup this month.

Created by Brendon Small of *Home Movies* fame and comedy writer Tommy Blacha (*Da Ali G Show*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and *TV Funhouse*), *Metalocalypse* is the kind of satire of the metal scene that can only come from people who love and respect the genre of music. In fact, the idea for the show came about one night when Small and Blacha took in a Metal show together at a small L.A. venue.

"Tommy is the only guy I knew in the comedy world who went and saw metal shows with me," says Small, who attended Boston's famous Berklee College of Music a while back, and also writes and performs

all the show's songs. "I couldn't listen to metal when I was studying music in school. You can only study classical and jazz. After graduation, I went back to metal, and realized that the music had become much heavier and scarier in the past ten years!"

As a stand-up performer, Small developed a "scary heavy metal dude" for one of his comedy acts, loosely based on one of the members of Buffalo-based death metal band, Cannibal Corpse. "One of my friends said, 'Man, this act should be a show...this IS a show.' So we talked to Cartoon Network's Mike Lazzo, who is also a big music fan, and he pretty much gave us the go-ahead after a phone conversation! I wrote the theme song for the show, and we did a pilot and he gave us a 20-episode deal."

The creators both believe that the timing is perfect for a cool animated spoof of the metal scene. "You know, when the movie *This Is Spinal Tap* came out, it was so brilliant, that you couldn't do another spoof of that genre for another 10 years," notes Blacha. "It's the same thing that happened

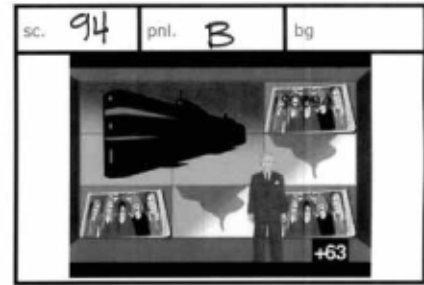
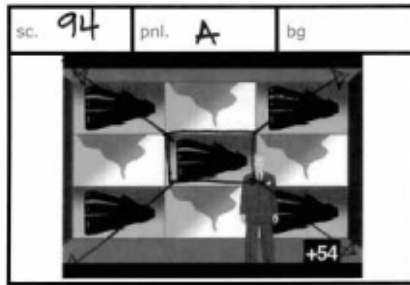


Brendon Small (left with guitar) and Tommy Blacha

when *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was made into a movie. You couldn't do a play based on the book back then because the movie was so brilliant. You have to wait 10 years to go back to the source material!

The over-the-top theatrics of this particular music scene give Small and Blacha plenty of opportunities to have fun with their favorite performers. As the press notes for the show explain, "Burdened with the stupidity that comes along with being major stars, they manage to cause more death, destruction and scandal than any other celebrity in recorded history."

Using Flash and After Effects, the hard-working team at Los Angeles-based Titmouse Studio (led by Chris Prynosi) went to great lengths to make sure the show looked and sounded better if not as good as the creators had in mind. "We didn't want the show to look like some of the other Flash-produced shows out there," says Blacha. "There is still a stigma attached to Flash, but when we saw the final results, we were blown away by how great every-



thing looked, especially thanks to the amazing work done by our art director Antonio Canobbio and [director/co-producer] Jon Schnepp."

Of course, when you are centering a show on musicians, one of your biggest goals is to make sure the animated rock performances are realistic and don't remind viewers of what they had seen on *The Archies* or *Josie and the Pussycats*. "So many shows had f***ed up what we've been trying to do with bad loops and characters playing with no passion," Small admits. "I've been playing guitar for 16 years, and we wanted to use Krank amps and Gibson Guitars to capture the real thing ... I had the animators film me doing the solos, so we could have a close rendition of what I was doing."

According to Blacha, the folks at Gibson also helped out with the animation by providing the animation team with the company's CAD (Computer Aided Design) files.

"The funny thing is that when you approach the genre of heavy metal, there's a lot of responsibility that comes with it," adds Small. "When word got out that we were doing the show, we heard back from the real metalheads who said, 'You guys better not f*** it up! You have to make it cool and authentic.' The good news is that they've seen the trailer and seem very excited about the show. We also have an amazing voice cast. James Hetfield and



Kirk Hammett of Metallica have done voices for the show as well as Swedish band Arch Enemy and Seattle's Nevermore. Of course, we were fortunate to have Mark Hamill (as the voice of series regular, Senator Stampington). It's a real geek-fest. But it's important for us not to have celebrity guests like some other shows have done. They have to really serve the story and be integral to what's going on in each episode."

So how does it feel to go 180 degrees from the sweet world of little Brendon Small of *Home Movies* to the loud and dark universe of metal? "I loved doing that show, but I also wanted to change gears really badly," notes Brendan. "I don't see the point of repeating myself unless I'm offered mil-

lions of dollars. For me, *Metalocalypse* is a passion project. It had to look bad-ass. This is not a glam band...The guys have to look scary and must smell bad! But with every show, you get to know the characters and their eccentricities better and end up liking them eventually."

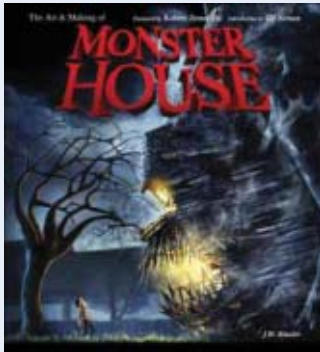
It's one of the animated band members, Skwisgaar Skwigelf, who puts the whole project into perspective in the press notes: "Heavy or not, the world is a black vortex of black nothingness and I hate our audience! Art is stupid. There is only food and death. Our music is both food and death!" Rock on, brother. ■

***Metalocalypse* premieres on Cartoon Network's [adult swim] block on Sunday, August 6 at 11:45 p.m.**

Objects of Our Affection: Toys and Tie-In Odds and Ends

Coffee-Table Monster

Although art books about animated features seem to be written as fast as Dan Brown's royalty checks, we were pleasantly surprised to see J. W. Rinzler's beautifully designed and multi-layered tome, **The Art and Making of Monster House** (Insight Editions, \$45). With a foreword penned by exec producer Robert Zemeckis and intro by the pic's director Gil Kenan, this handsome production includes lavish four-color art, 3D pictures, gatefolds and die-cut overlays of all the different stages of the performance-driven animated movie. Taking a page from the *Drag-ology* book series, the tome is packed with special removeable elements (in envelopes), cool cards and a movie poster. Rinzler, a senior editor at LucasFilm who also wrote *The Making of Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* and the folks at Sony Pictures Imageworks have certainly raised the bar when it comes to tie-in production books. ■



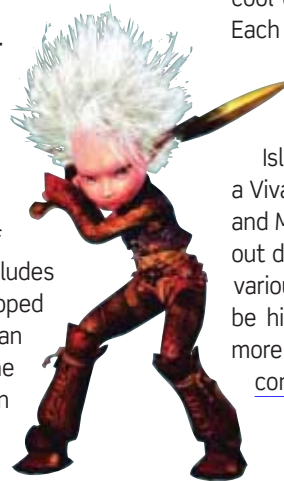
at Sony Pictures Imageworks have certainly raised the bar when it comes to tie-in production books. ■

Party Favors

The folks at 4Kids TV have already kicked off the big licensing fiesta surrounding their new fall series **Viva Piñata**. The bright-colored piñata characters were catching the eyes of attendees at the recent Licensing Show in New York. The CG-animated series features over 60 different piñata species, each with a special name (Hudson Horstachio, Mousemallow and Elephanilla should give you an idea) and lots of



cool character traits and abilities. Each episode of the show finds the piñata friends solving mysteries and having adventures on their Piñata Island. Plans are already set for a Viva Piñata Xbox 360 game (Rare and Microsoft co-venture) to come out during the holiday season, and various licensed merchandises will be hitting stores next spring. For more info, visit www.vivapiñata.com. ■



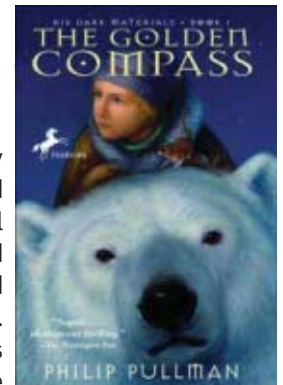
Small, Eco-Friendly and French

French auteur Luc Besson's much-anticipated CG-animated fantasy **Arthur and the Invisibles** (a.k.a. **Arthur and the Minimoys**) won't hit movie theaters in Europe until December (The Weinstein Co. will release it in the U.S. on January 12.) However, plans for a major merchandising blitz surrounding the movie are already underway. Based on a series of books by Besson (*The Fifth Element*, *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*) the film follows the adventures of a 10-year-old who searches for hidden treasure in the land of tiny creature living in harmony with nature. The musician-friendly cast list includes David Bowie, Madonna, Snoop Dogg and Freddie Highmore. A videogame developed and published by Atari, a cool line of action figures and toys by Lansay and an iTunes-friendly soundtrack are only some of the hot merchandising plans for the feature. And if the pic is a big hit, you can expect the full trilogy treatment in the tradition of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. It's going to be, as the French would say, *superfantastique*. ■

Will Compass Point to Gold?

Now that we're talking fantasy blockbusters, we have to give the thumbs up to the folks at Scholastic and New Line. They had a really nice presence at the Licensing Show with their huge white polar bear, one of the major characters in the upcoming adaptation of Phillip Pullman's **The Golden Compass**. The release date for the movie has been set for November 16, 2007, and although director Chris Weitz (*About a Boy*, *Antz*) abandoned the project briefly, things are back on track—all fingers crossed. The fantasy has captured the imagination of millions of fans since its first

volume came out in 1995. The story follows a brave heroine named Lyra and her shape-shifting animal daemon, as they look for a lost friend in all kinds of icy landscapes and parallel worlds. It's the old good vs. evil yarn, but it has major religious and scientific echoes as well. We're just pondering this philosophical question: If Lyra got into a battle with Harry Potter, who would be the winner? ■





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Domo Domination

Fans of **Domo-Kun**, the dim-witted mascot of Japanese broadcaster NHK, were thrilled to find out that Nickelodeon is developing and producing 26 two-minute episodes of a stop-motion show featuring the fuzzy one in conjunction with the Domo Production Committee. Stateside audiences know Domo for his appearance in the mock PSA featuring the immortal lines "Every time you masturbate, God kills a kitten!" Not surprisingly, there are over 400,000 fan-created web sites dedicated to Domo, a strange creature who lives in an underground cave with a sage old rabbit, watches too much TV and listens to bad music. New York-based Big Tent Entertainment and Melbourne's Gaffney International have acquired the North American rights to the character. The U.S. merchandising

plans will target tweens and teens, led by lifestyle and digital media categories. The year ahead is going to be a heady time for the little brown guy that hatched out of an egg! ■



LICENSING

Brak to Basics

If Al Gore's new movie about global warming and all the political turmoil around the planet have got you down, there are two shiny packages that might cheer you up in August. Cartoon Network's **The Brak Show: Vol. Two** (\$29.98) and **Sealab 2021: Season Four the Final Episodes!** (\$26.98) will be out on DVD on August 8. *The Brak Show* DVD offers 14 12-minute episodes about the early years of the



Space Ghost's villainous sidekick as he hangs out with his best pal Zorak and puts up with the strange parents in an alien world that is right out of *Leave It to Beaver*. The 2-disc *Sealab* package comes with 13 episodes and bonus material such as alternative endings, deleted scenes

and something called "Best of Sealab/Sunken Treasures."

"We're officially putting these shows to rest," says **Erik Resnick**, senior director of Cartoon Network Home Entertainment. "Both Brak and Sealab were part of the original offerings on [adult swim] and they have done very well on DVD before." According to Resnick, 2006 has been something of a watershed year for the cabler's DVDs. "We were very happy with how well both *Robot Chicken* and *Venture Brothers* have performed. These DVDs are mainstays for our consumer products division. It's quite interesting to see how well a show like *Samurai Jack*, which hasn't been on the air for three years, continues to sell on DVD." ■

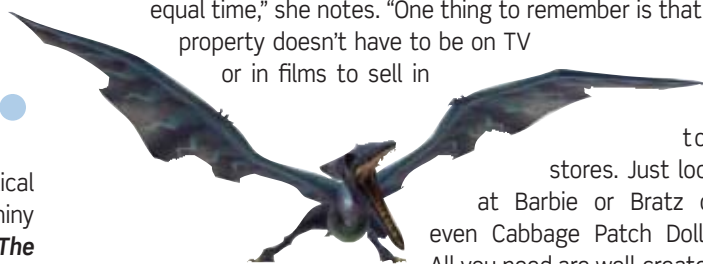


Licensing Doll

We caught up with **Joy Tashjian**, president of the Joy Tashjian Marketing Group right after the Licensing Show in New York. The supremely busy indie maven is currently handling the merch plans for a hot collection of kids properties including Breakthrough's *Atomic Betty*, *Captain Flamingo* and *Miss BG*, and BKN's *Legend of the Dragon*, *Zorro: The Next Generation* and *King Kong*, to name a few. She told us that she foresees a surge in kids' game shows for primetime. (She should know: She also handles the merchandising for ABC's mega-hit *Deal or No Deal*.) At the show, Tashjian also signed the fun Bejuba! Entertainment series **Monster Warriors**, which airs on Jetix in Europe. Created by Wilson Coneybeare, the vfx-laden series features all kinds of campy B-movie monsters that would make ideal toys for boys.



So what is her take on the business in 2006? "When you're an indie, you're always fighting to make sure everyone gets equal time," she notes. "One thing to remember is that a property doesn't have to be on TV or in films to sell in



toy stores. Just look at Barbie or Bratz or even Cabbage Patch Dolls. All you need are well-created characters!" Sure, Joy, but we're counting on those Howie Mandel dolls to show up under the tree this Christmas! ■

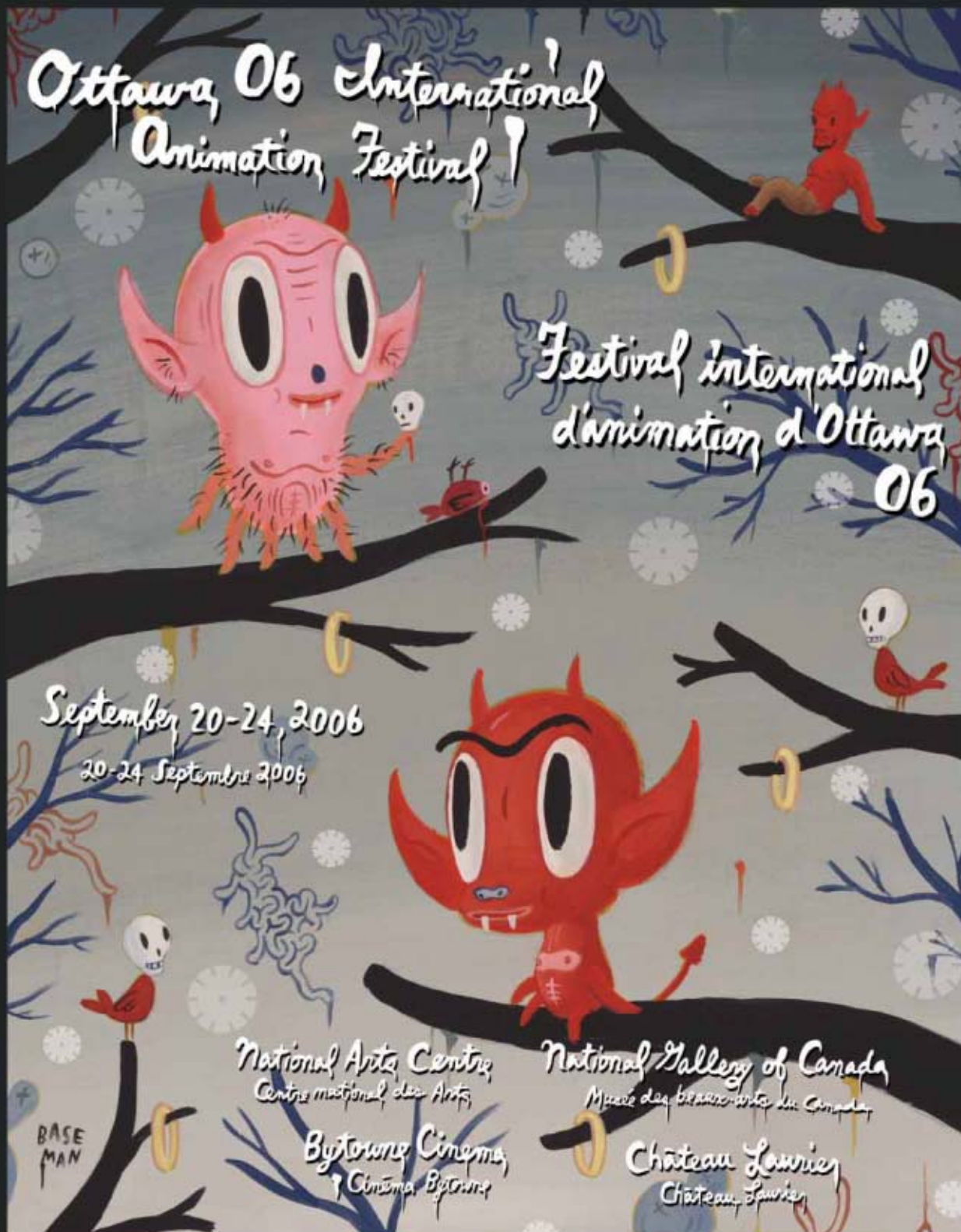
Fresh From the Factory

The following are some of the new arrivals on the toy and collectible website, entertainmentearth.com:



1. Duck Dodgers K-g Vinyl Figure (Funko, \$12.99)
2. Buffy/Angel Vampire Plush Puppet (Diamond, 49.99)
3. Stikfas Assault Team Mega Pack (Stikfas, \$20.99)
4. Duck Dodgers Instant Martian Vinyl Figure (Funko, \$12.99)
5. Star Wars Unleashed Battle Pack Wave 3 (Hasbro, \$39.99)
6. Devil May Cry III Dante Revoltech Action Figure (Organic, \$24.99)
7. Neon Genesis Evangelion Revoltech EVA-01 Figure (Organic, \$24.99)
8. Star Wars Galactic Heroes 2006 Wave 3 (Hasbro, \$82.99)
9. Star Wars Qui-Gon Jinn Mini-Bust (Gentle Giant, \$49.99)
10. Classic Peanuts Woodstock Bobblehead (Funko, \$11.99)

Source: www.entertainmentearth.com 7.13.06



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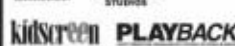
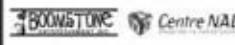
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Time to Unwrap Those New Digital Toys!

A look at some of the new and improved tech releases that can make life a little easier for vfx and digital animation pros. by Chris Grove



While congressmen, the odd White House official and corporate executives often conveniently find a way to hold their conferences, trade missions and junkets in Paris, Bermuda or London, SIGGRAPH organizers picked Boston for their 2006 confab. Nothing against Beantown. It's a great city. But it ain't Poipu Beach. And it speaks to a certain seriousness of purpose. There are no white sand beaches within 500 miles of the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center to distract conventioners from the matter at hand—all things CG.

This year finds yet more advances in research, commercially available software packages and the yearnings of young CGI-philosophers for better, faster and more photo-reality. "Most people I know are interested in animation education databases and online services run by industry professionals," says Andrew Huang, whose short film *Doll Face* is part of this year's SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival. Huang is a 19 year-old USC undergrad who, though not even a film major, is making quite a rep for himself in the CG animation world.

"(My colleagues) want less tools and more services and support. Everyone I've talked to wants easy, communicable, user-friendly online services for learning specialized aspects of 3D animation production." Among others, he cites the subscription CGI website animationrigs.com. "Aside from tutorials, it offers an automated rigging system that you can just plug into your character in Maya. Friends tell me that this

system is versatile and saves a lot of time for those who build, rig and animate their own characters."

Among the biggest news just announced, are the significant upgrades to the near-ubiquitous Maya. The Autodesk briefing on Maya 8 says the new version focuses on three areas: core performance, productivity and pipeline efficiencies. Among other things, the 64-bit Windows XP Professional version should address memory and performance bottlenecks that

ited (Standalone) is \$6,999 and Maya Unlimited (Network) is \$6,999. International pricing may vary. For his part, Huang and his young colleagues may not be upgrading so soon. "Overall, I'd spend money on subscription services before purchasing an upgraded version of Maya or any other software package out there right now," he says.

However, if Autodesk gets its new, free portal off to the right start, Huang might be able to hang on to his money. The Area (the-area.com) launched on

July 31, 2006. It's billed as a community portal focused initially on artists and developers using Maya, 3ds Max, Motion Builder and VIZ used in games, film, post production or design visualization. "We wanted to create a website focused on artists and developers with an environment that includes content to support increased knowledge of the products and collaboration with the overall 3D community," says JoAnne Gaudreau, Autodesk marketing manager of community-

building initiatives for the company's media and entertainment division. The site will include: Tips and tutorials for all levels of expertise. Downloads for product trials, textures and shaders, plug-ins and scripts. There will also be a showcase area for member portfolios and blog and discussion areas. "It's a back-to-3D-basics concept that aims to break down barriers related to specific products or markets," Gaudreau says. "Our goal is to support our community as much as we can."

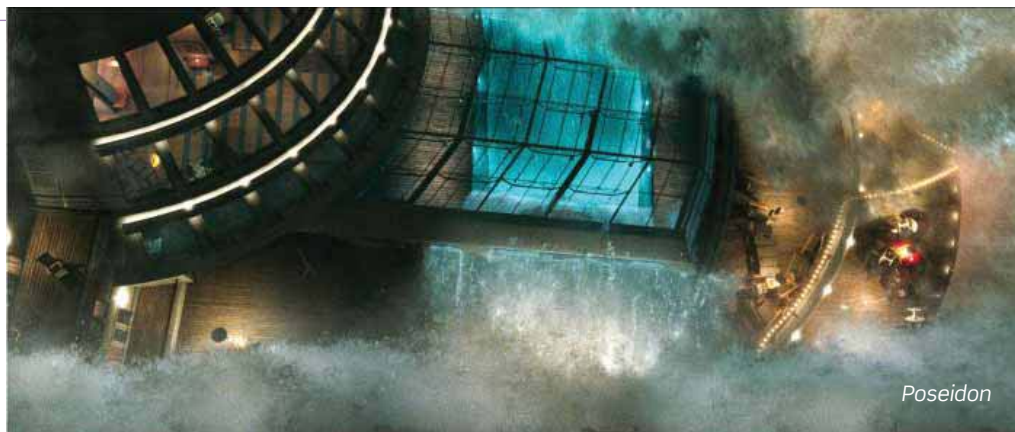
Although there won't be any birthday cake at SIGGRAPH '06, Adobe's now venerable Flash marks its 10th an-



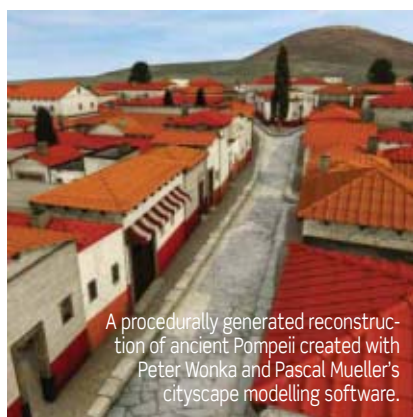
Doll Face

have been identified by users of the current version. (There's a 32-bit version for Mac OS X users.) Maya 8 promises new, streamlined modeling and texturing tools and workflows.

It also delivers enhanced pipeline efficiencies to make it easier to manage data in an environment that may include multiple 2D and 3D tools. Maya 8 is scheduled to ship in August 2006. Early-access upgrade downloads for Platinum members will be available on August 1, 2006. It will ship simultaneously on all platforms. As for pricing, Maya Complete (Standalone) is \$1,999, Maya Complete (Network) is \$2,999, Maya Unlim-



Poseidon



A procedurally generated reconstruction of ancient Pompeii created with Peter Wonka and Pascal Mueller's cityscape modelling software.



Viscous letters that splash into a pool of water, then change into low density inviscid fuel bubbling up and burning when they hit the surface, illustrate advancements Frank Losasso and the research team have made for animating multiple interacting fluids.

niversary this month. Starting life as a sketching tool, Flash has transmogrified into a leading animation tool. "As the product matured, its true 'sweet spot' became interactive media and applications," says Mike Downey, senior product manager for Flash. As a result, the general tone and focus of the Flash community moved away from character animation and toward interactive design.

"Recently, however, we've seen a renewed interest in using Flash for character animation, especially in broadcast television. We're taking a look at what we can do in the future to make Flash an even better tool for this me-

dium." Balancing the needs of the two sub-communities of Flash users—interactive web designers and broadcast animators—is a challenge. The former group remains the largest user-group. "I've found that people doing character animation have a fairly common set of feature requests," says Downey, "improvements to drawing tools, bone systems and advancements in our export to video options. We're addressing several of these and other requests over our next few releases."

Animators may have more to celebrate when some of the latest research makes its way into commercially available software. SIGGRAPH, after all, started as a purely academic conclave. Among the most interesting papers being presented this year, is one on multiple interacting fluids. There are existing techniques

to simulate water, fire or smoke, but not all at the same time, all interacting with each other. One of the four authors of the paper is Frank Losasso of Stanford University and Industrial Light & Magic. Losasso also worked as a fluid dynamics engineer on *Poseidon* (2006). What Losasso and his colleagues have come up with will allow for a whole new host of animations to be done, such as a liquid being on fire and emitting smoke into the air. Losasso says software applications based on the new algorithms will up the photo-real ante. "It's a leap in the sense that what had to be hacked together or manually animated before (which is very difficult for complex fluid



the-area.com

behavior) can now be simulated with relative ease," says the Stanford University doctoral student.

Dry land applications should also get a boost from the results of another body of research at Arizona State University. Professor Peter Wonka and Pascal Mueller, a PhD candidate and research assistant at the Computer Vision Lab in Switzerland, are working on ways to make the creation of virtual cityscapes both more efficient and more detailed. "An animator can create a large model with very high detail in days instead of months," says Wonka of his research. Wonka believes the work will be very important particularly for animators who have to model larger urban areas, but don't have a huge budget. "We've had numerous requests from the entertainment industry about our software, but we currently do not have the resources to start a company based on our work," Wonka says. In simple terms, the software uses rules to generate geometry. These rules can then be applied in different contexts. For example, rules for a door can be used to generate doors of different sizes, depending on how much space is available. Also, different rules can be combined, leading to an exponential possibility of combinations and variations. ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have any hot tips regarding the vfx world, you can email him at edit@animation-magazine.net



Hiss Hiss, Bang Bang!

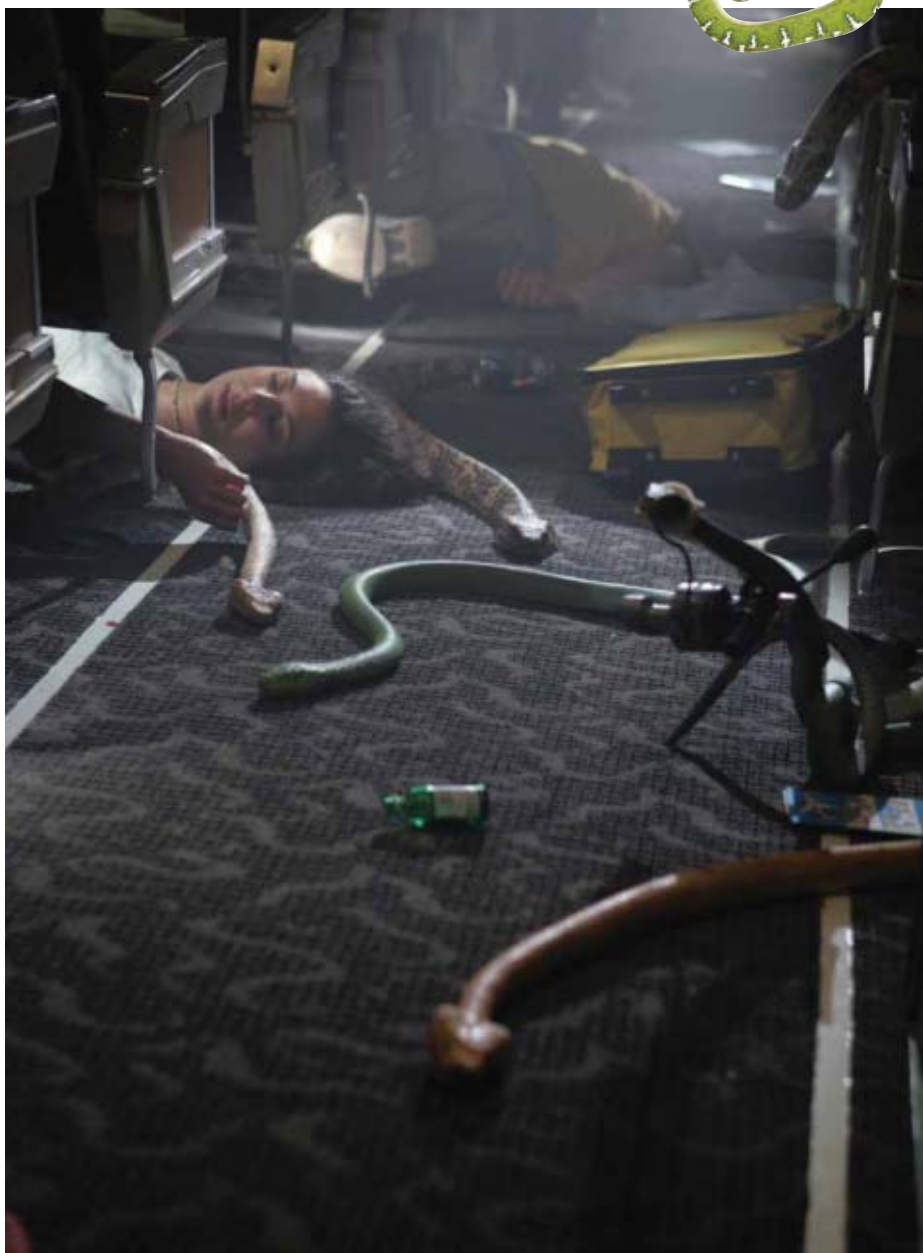
How the patient teams at CaféFX and Hybride used CG technology to bring the slithering reptiles to life in this summer's highly anticipated thriller *Snakes on a Plane*. by Ron Magid



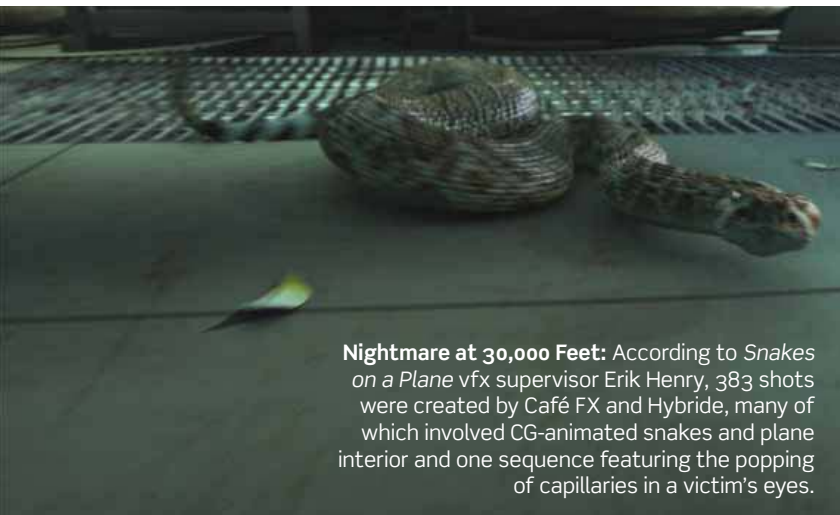
Thanks to *Blair Witch*-sized pre-release buzz and Internet mojo, the high-concept movie *Snakes on a Plane* has become one of the most talked about movies of the summer. But what is a studio publicist's dream has been the stuff of nightmares for the film's visual effects supervisor, Erik Henry. "I was traveling this weekend, and I forgot I was wearing a *Snakes on a Plane* shirt until I'd hear people say under their breath, 'Oh, Snakes on a Plane!'" laughs Henry (*About Schmidt*, *Gothika*) who anticipates a nice bump after *Snakes*, despite its harm to his psyche. "I flew back and forth between L.A. and Canada for 16 months while we were working on the film, and I would just look up towards the baggage compartment and think, 'What would happen if snakes got loose in here?'"

Much of that angst stems from Henry's understandable aversion to snakes. Director David Ellis selected fourteen varieties, from sidewinders to pythons, then handed the reins to Henry and told him to turn 400 of them loose on the plane—and the audience. "What a great opportunity!" Henry says. "David said, 'You put the snakes where you think they should be, doing the things you think snakes do, I trust you, go off and do it.'"

California-based CaféFX and Canada's Hybride handled the 383 vfx shots, which included the CG plane and digital gonad removal on a male Chihuahua. But by far the biggest challenge was replicating snake behavior via animation. "I think if you asked Scott Gordon at CaféFX and Pierre Raymond at Hy-



VISUAL EFFECTS



Nightmare at 30,000 Feet: According to *Snakes on a Plane* vfx supervisor Erik Henry, 383 shots were created by Café FX and Hybride, many of which involved CG-animated snakes and plane interior and one sequence featuring the popping of capillaries in a victim's eyes.



bride, they'd say that snake animation is so complicated because sometimes their head leads their movement forward or sideways and sometimes their neck, plus there's multiple points of contact with the ground," Henry says. "Both companies spent the lion's share of prep and production building rigs, which enabled junior animators to do more and senior animators to do some really amazing stuff."

Almost as complex as animating the snakes was tracking them into a cabin environment that was inevitably bouncing up and down thanks to a huge gimbal simulating nausea-inducing turbulence. "The special effects team really gave you the feeling you were on a bucking plane at 30,000 feet," Henry says, "but when we did a test up at Hybride, long shots with snakes in the foreground slithering down the aisle, they had trouble tracking them and they discovered that the entire fuselage set was torque-ing, which made it nearly impossible to track in the traditional ways. Hybride tracked mainly with 3D Equalizer, Inferno and Boujou, and near the end, the tracking was so good they could place a CG snake anywhere and have it track. In fact, that's how the tracking was done—using a static snake—before they turned the shots over to animation."

While Hybride used Softimage and CaféFX employed Maya for animation, both companies hand-painted their digital snakes using photographic reference. And the hero snakes—modeled down to individual scales—were incredibly computationally heavy. When it comes to CaféFX's Scarface, a Gaboon

viper with two-inch long fangs, or Hybride's hero rattlesnake, Jake, "I defy any snake expert to tell me that's not a real snake," Henry says.

And then there's Kong, a 20-foot python animated by Café FX in literally the film's most eye-popping moment. The sequence was well along when the Internet buzz was reaching a crescendo, and New Line decided to chuck the original PG rating and go for an R. As Henry explains, "Kong was supposed to squeeze someone to death, so we decided it would be more elegant to just be in tight on the actor's eyes and hear this crunching sound and I thought, 'Why don't we just have the capillaries in his eyes burst and blood cover the whites of the eyes?' So we cyberscanned the actor's head and body in clothes and in different poses so we could make Kong appear to wrap around him and especially interact with his head since we had to be so tight on his face. After the director approved the shot and we went all the way with it, New Line said, 'We want more—let's make that scene bloodier!'"

The shot still starts in close-up, but now the camera pulls out and audiences are drawn in to a very complex scene as Kong wraps around his victim and squeezes him to death. "The capillaries still burst, but the special effects guys added blood tubes in the actor's nose and ears which we painted out," elaborates Henry. "We pull back to see Kong's tongue licking the victim's head, then we reveal the whole snake head rising

up somewhat monster-like—keeping as far from *Anaconda* as possible—stretching his jaws over the guy's head and chomping down."

Henry believes that particular scene is one of the biggest, high-impact moments in the film and that they couldn't have delivered it without some interaction on set. "So when we did the re-shoot, we wrapped a green dryer tube around the actor, slightly smaller in diameter than the digital python would be, taped tight with green tape," notes Henry. "We also got one of those green foam noodle floatation devices used in pools and put a small wire through it. Then Scott Gordon and I sat behind the actor. I tugged the big dryer tube around his lower abdomen, and Scott pulled the green tube that was going to be the upper part of the snake's body to create that cinch and the interaction with the costume for the final wrap."

That's when Henry discovered that a great rig and superb animation could only take the effect so far: "As the snake progressed down, one thing or another didn't look right. We had to do these blends to fix little bends here and there, which took hours."

And perhaps gave Henry nightmares. "Those started about 16 months ago and have never really gone away, but now they're not quite nightmares, snakes just happen to be present in my dreams," Henry grins. "But it was worth it. David is a unique director. I owe him so much—he always says, 'I did a plane and you did the snakes.'" ■

New Line's *Snakes on a Plane* slithers to theaters on August 18.



Cause & Effect

Nymph
Nodes

Industrial Light & Magic
dives into the mysterious
water world of Shyamalan's
Lady in the Water.
by Barbara Robertson

In *Lady in the Water*, a storybook nymph-like character (Bryce Dallas Howard) has slipped into Cleveland Heep's (Paul Giamatti) gritty real world. Heep, an apartment building manager, and his fellow tenants discover their personal magic as they fend off dangerous demons and help her return to her world. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan, who conceived the fable for his children, the Warner Bros. film incorporates visual effects by Industrial Light & Magic. In the end, though, the summer movie ended up having more vfx shots than Shyamalan intended at first!

"Night saw our tools and techniques and met the artists when he visited ILM," says Marshall Krasser, compositing supervisor, who moved onto *Lady in the Water* after supervising 45 compositors for *War of the Worlds*. "I think he was aware of a lot of stuff we could do but not the whole scope."

ILM's work centered primarily on two creatures—the demon "Scrunt," which is a wolf-like creature with glowing red eyes that's covered with grass rather than fur, and the "Eatlon," an enormous eagle-like creature that rescues Story, the heroine. (Both beasts were designed by "Crash" McCreery.)

"We had a small number of shots, but Night kept adding shots and changing them," says Doug Smythe, digital production supervisor who handled look development for the scrunt. "He always wants to make the film better so if you think of something even two days before delivery, he will ask for it."

The first time the Scrunt appears, for



example, the creature materializes as if in a nightmare. You see the grass moving, but you don't realize it's a creature until the slow, menacing demon appears. Because the film production crew didn't shoot the unplanned sequence during principal photography, visual effects supervisor Ed Hirsh had Giamatti's double filmed at ILM on a bluescreen stage outfitted with grass and trees from Home Depot. Then, the studio composited the digital Scrunt into a digital background.

"We added mist and atmospherics, digital rain and practical rain, trees painted by people in the art department and live-action footage of sprinklers that Ed [Hirsh] shot," says Krasser. "As the scrunt walks forward, we animated the grass he knocks over."

Modelers at ILM built the Scrunt in Autodesk's Maya, rigged the creature and created face shapes in the studio's proprietary Zeno, animated him in Maya, placed lights in Zeno and rendered him in Pixar's RenderMan. To cover the wolf-like body with grass, the crew called the studio's hair and fur system into action. "I modified the system to output blades of grass rather than hairs," says Smythe.

With this system, hundreds of guide hairs define the shape, position and style of hairs in particular areas on a creature's body, and then the system automatically fills in similar hairs to a specified thickness. "Instead of outputting a hair cylinder or curve, we had it output polygon meshes that were shaped like blades of



As Shyamalan began putting the film together, the digital Scrunt got extra screen time. In one shot, for example, the director wanted to replace an animatronic Scrunt with the digital character. "Night wanted a long tight shot of Scrunt's face with a performance, a snarl and a glint in the eye that's hard to shoot practically," Smythe says. After trying to animate Scrunt's face in ILM's Sabre system (based on Autodesk Discreet's Inferno) by frame warping and morphing, the crew decided to upgrade the model. "For cost reasons, we had built him only as detailed as we needed for the shots we knew about," says Smythe.

Krasser created the background by

the whole background digitally."

"Nowadays, we can pretty much do anything," he adds. A small example: Inside the building, the Scrunt happens across a dryer with a red cloth tumbling inside. It's a bad omen. The creature barks at it and fogs the window, which meant the compositors had to fog the real dryer in the live-action footage. "I looked for a practical element but didn't find what I wanted," says Krasser. Later, at home, he spritzed a scanner with water, smeared in a little olive oil and nose grease and breathed onto the glass as the machine scanned. Then, at work the next day, he combined two versions of resulting scans to create the element. "It worked," he says. "I made some animated garbage mattes, luminance mattes with the practical mattes, to fade it off. It looked real because it is real."

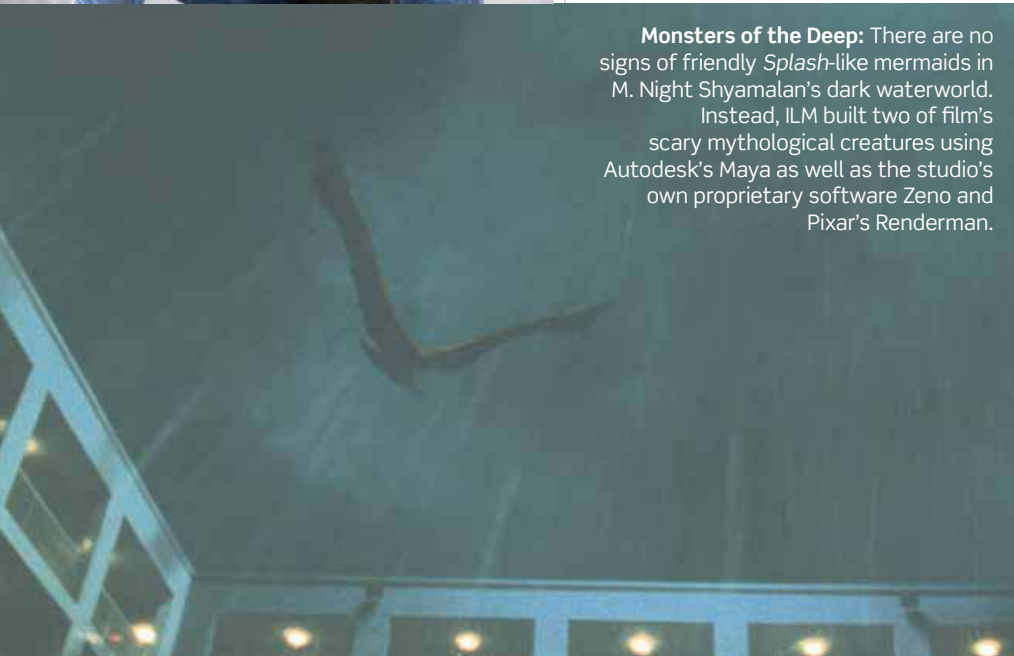
A larger example of the film's vfx glories: Shyamalan decided to change the camera move that was shot on location of the Scrunt coming into a hallway. "We had to create the hallway with simple geometry and then project textures from the original plate onto the digital hall," says Krasser.

Another example takes place during a dramatic rescue scene in which the digital eagle (known as the Eatlon) flies down in the middle of a storm to wrap the storybook lady in a wing and carry her, we assume, back into her world. ILM modeled, painted, and animated the bird, simulated feathers on its 35-foot wingspan and flew it through the rain as lightning flashed. The eatlon pauses for a moment to look down before flying on up through the clouds. The idea for the reflective pause came from Hirsh. "Ed [Hirsh] pitched the concept to Night," says Krasser. "The whole background for the shot was digital. Our digimatte department created a synthetic environment that resembled the location where the film was shot and even put in traffic and street lights." Compositors fitted the digital eagle into the synthetic background to create the dramatic ending.

"We were able to get our creative juices flowing and give Night the flexibility to tell his story," says Krasser. "We had a really good time." ■

Warner Bros.' *Lady in the Water* is currently playing in theaters nationwide.

Monsters of the Deep: There are no signs of friendly *Splash*-like mermaids in M. Night Shyamalan's dark waterworld. Instead, ILM built two of film's scary mythological creatures using Autodesk's Maya as well as the studio's own proprietary software Zeno and Pixar's Renderman.



grass," says Smythe. "We didn't model the grass blades. The system generated the grass at render time." To put twigs and branches on the Scrunt's face, modelers painted details in Pixologic's Zbrush and modeled additional woody material around its nose and feet. Kevin Barnhill and Robert Weaver smoothed out technical issues during production.

To establish the Scrunt's menacing demeanor, animators gave it wolverined actions: Its eyes narrow; it stalks, crouches and leaps. It also has a few odd characteristics that Shyamalan requested. "When it moved down the hallway, Night wanted it to move like a crab," says Krasser. "We said, 'But a dog doesn't move like a crab.' He said, 'it's not a dog, it's a Scrunt.'"

working in ILM's CompTime to composite pieces of foliage behind the digital Scrunt. "It took four hours per frame to render because of the depth of field in the extreme close up," Krasser says. "Also, I added water drips that bounced off its nose."

Similarly, Krasser created entire backgrounds in Comptime for another sequence, this one shot by ILM on a blue-screen stage. In this scene, woody twig-covered otherworldly police haul off the Scrunt. "As Night was cutting the sequence, he realized he wanted more action," says Krasser. "So, Ed Hirsh had the stuntmen and the suits sent up here. We didn't have any backgrounds; we pieced some together in compositing from other shots and reference photos and re-created

Digital Magic

Whimsical animation in two recent TV blurbs lifts the medium to a higher place.



by Chris Grove

I can't remember where I read or heard it (maybe I just imagined it), but someone once said that the reason there's so much bad art in the world is because the road to great art is necessarily littered with far more failure than triumph. Lousy art serves a purpose. It demonstrates just how hard and rare it is to create the likes of *Hamlet*, *Guernica*, *As I Lay Dying* or *Citizen Kane*.

That's just as true of one of my favorite forms of *pop* art—television commercials. Most ads are not very good because they're produced by large committees. By the time every agency guy or gal weighs in with his or her opinion and every client exec gives *their* edit notes, a once great spot can be about as funny and original as a frat house roast. Despite all that, very good and even great work survives the process (usually more by accident than design). And much of the really solid spots are animated.

Two recent examples are spots that haven't been seen stateside. The first is a magical animated ad for the National Lottery in the U.K. As odd as it is beautiful, *The Big Win*, created by London-based Studio AKA, is a mysterious and humorous 60-second story about a man who shares his good fortune by giving away smiles to everyone he meets. "(The ad) comes out of certain books and recollections and influences I had as a child," says Marc Craste, the award-winning animator and director behind the spot. "One series of illustrated books, the Moomins books, had a big influence on me." Most of all, Craste says, he wanted to create a spot to break away from the kind of sophisticated animation and characters he's been doing recently. "I wanted to do something more urgent and natural." (His short film *Jojo in the Stars* won both the 2004 BAFTA for Best Animated Short Film and the 2005 Cartoon d'Or.)

While the spot has the look of a classic Disney 2D film, it was created with 3D animation software (XSI) run-

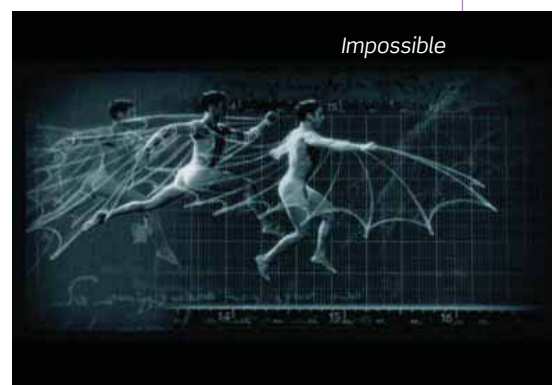
ning on a PC. Editing and compositing were done with After Effects.

As much as the visuals, the hook of the piece is an obscure music track recorded in 1957. A "Smile and a Ribbon" is sung by the recording duo of Patience and Prudence McIntyre (the B Side of "Tonight You Belong to Me"). They were 11- and 14-year old sisters when their bandleader father took a recording of theirs to a record company executive and the amateur duo became a two-hit minor sensation. "When we heard the track, we knew nothing else in the world would ever do. Thank God we got the rights," says Philip Hunt, Studio AKA creative director.

While some ad execs blather about "breaking through the clutter" (trying to emphasize the uniqueness of *anything* with a cliché is a questionable rhetorical device), some creative types manage to keep their focus on the task at hand: Attempting, in 30 seconds or less, to get viewers to attach positive feelings to the product. And in doing so, having a shot at changing, or at least influencing, the viewer's buying preferences.

Case in point is the second foreign animated spot: A Prius ad from Curious Pictures currently running on Mexican TV. From south-of-the-border ad agency Nazca Saatchi & Saatchi, *Impossible* draws inspiration literally and figuratively from the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci. Directed by Curious Pictures' Flea Circus (John Robertson), the spot merges live action with animated illustrations of some of Da Vinci's inventions to highlight the eco-friendly pitch of the gas-electric hybrid Toyota sensation.

Opening with animation of an early creation myth of a tortoise that carries the earth and sky on its back, the story dissolves into an animated rendering of Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*—the classic drawing that illustrates the proportion of the male human form. The man leaps off his circle and morphs into a bird taking flight, recalling Da Vinci's bird-like flying machines. Blueprints of early automobiles transform into the Prius, which emits colorful flowers instead of smog. The spot showcases Robertson's unique style,



which marries the classic look of hand-drawn cel cartoons with other 2D and 3D animation elements. Robertson melded live-action still images (captured by Mexican production company Cuatro y Medio and directed by Norman Christianson) with drawings and scans composited in After Effects. The car in the final section was built and animated in 3D Studio Max. "After the 'live' sequences were assembled from stills shot in Mexico, we used individual frame hard-copy printouts registered to animation pegs to create the drawings,"

says Robertson. "These were then assembled as animated clips and combed back over the live sequences."

Founded in New Zealand in 1993, Robertson's Flea Circus joined the Curious Pictures roster in 1997. Based in London since 2000, Flea Circus has animated work for Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, MTV, Now TV and others. ■

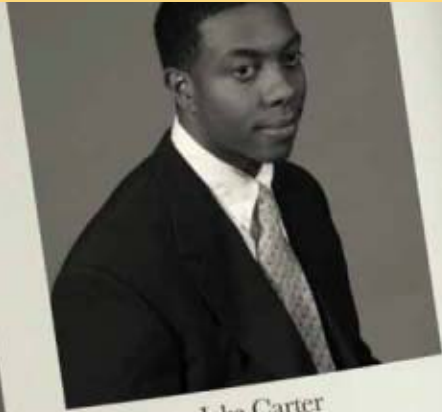




Thomas Williams



Mandy Adams



Jake Carter



Jenny Smith



Michael Maya



Walter Nemoy

J.F.K. High School 2004

21

3D Model By Ex'pression Student Paul Nguyen

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Tech Reviews

Monarch Computer's
Hornet Workstation

When I was contacted by Monarch Computers about reviewing their Hornet Workstation, I thought, "Sure, why not? There are workstations and there are workstations." What I failed to realize is how they took prime components and stuck it in such a unique package.

(WARNING: Geek alert. If you are not into the specs of machines, please skip to the following paragraph.)

The demo model that was sent had decent specs, and everything that a production artist could expect or hope for. It sports an EVGA 131-K8_NF44-BX nForce4 SLI motherboard, an AMD Opteron 175 DualCore, 2 GB of RAM, a 750GB Barracuda SATA3G, a Plextor PX-760A/SW DualLayer 18x8x18x DVD burner, and an ATI FireGL V7200 with 256MB and Dual_DVI ports.

The first thing that struck me about the Hornet is its portability. It sits 11" wide, 9.5" high, 13" deep and weighs 8 lbs. As small as it is, it wouldn't be a burden to haul around, but Monarch has mounted a handle on the front for even easier transport. The first thing that comes to mind is that it would be perfect for onset editing or compositing. An assistant editor could be sent to set with the box, and could digitize A-Camera on the fly while make log notations. Or a compositor can sit next to the Director of Photography and Visual Effect Supervisor and can be testing greenscreen composites. The Hornet is not the only option for this, obviously (laptops nowadays are quite capable of handling these heavy

functions).

The case is an anodized purple, but, you can order it in plenty of different colors and designs, including camo. The front plate has four USB2 ports for easy access of many peripherals (there are four more in the back). The floppy drive is a 7-in-1, so there are six more slots for a variety of photo cards and quick media. And finally, a headphone and mic jack.

The back supports plenty of peripherals. Four USB2 jacks (as mentioned previously), two serials, a parallel port (!), a Firewire 400, Gigabit port and audio ports that support 5.1 surround. A SPDIF and an Optical sound port are also available, which obviously makes the machine in a prime candidate for portable audio stations.

On the side of the box is an aquarium window looking into the guts of the machine with the FireGL card prominently displayed, which obviously ups the cosmetic cool factor. When you flip a switch on the back of the

by Todd
Sheridan
Perry



machine, it turns on an interior blue light, making the components glow like an alien mothership.

Aside from the look and feel of the machine, it functions like a charm. Boot-up time in seconds can be counted on your two hands. Responsiveness is beautiful in both 2D and 3D programs. The dual DVI ports provides for multiple monitors.

The configuration of the system sent for this review clocked in at \$3,168. At this price, it's comparable to BOXX, Alienware or other workstations from companies who make products geared for production. Heavy duty gamers would not shy away either—nor should they since the graphics hardware will be able to hold up to any games on the market today. Your average Best Buy customer looking for a machine to browse the Internet will still opt for the eMachine.

I'll probably pick one up myself.

Website: www.monarchcomputer.com

Price: \$3,168

Luxology's modo 201

San Mateo, Calif.-based Luxology has just released its newest version of modo, which is already known in many circles as a fantastic modeling package. Billed as one of most advanced polygonal and subdivision surface modeling tools ever created, modo 201 offers cutting-edge features that will be appreciated both by longtime users and newbie artists.

First and foremost, I have to mention mo-

a surface similar to Maya's Paint Effects. Instancing geometry has been optimized including abilities to isolate and represent instances as boxes for quick feedback.

Painting tools allow for painting textures directly onto the surface with non-destructive and procedural strokes including a parametric ink function which allows for painting from the incident angle of the camera. Painting is not limited to the color channel either (as noted above, you can paint geometry), but you can also paint your bump maps with immediate feedback in the viewport. Sophisticated UV mapping tools are included to help the texturing process, and probably could supplant the internal UV tools of the primary animation packages used by artists.

Not to limit itself exclusively to a modeling tool, modo has an internal render engine which offers all the bells and whistles like GI, Subsurface Scattering and Anisotropic Glossy Reflections. It even provides a quickie function to render a turntable without setting up animated cameras or anything. Keep in mind though, that modo is not an animation tool. It focuses on what it does best and doesn't diffuse its potential by trying to do everything.

I certainly recommend modelers and production houses to incorporate modo into their pipelines. It's fast and responsive, and the tools are built expressly to make a modeler's life easier. Because of its compatibility with the leading 3D packages (as a recommendation to Luxology, you might want to include XSI), you don't have to worry about conversion voodoo to move the models back and forth. Plus, with the variety of scripting languages available, more advanced users should be confident that custom pipelines can be accommodated. I know I'm going to do most of my modeling in modo from now on.

Website: www.luxology.com

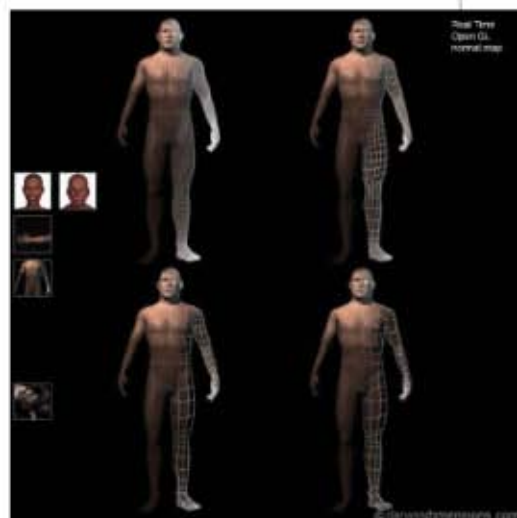
Price: \$895, \$395 (upgrade)

Darwin Dimensions' Evolver

To say that Evolver from Darwin Dimensions is a time saver would be a dramatic understatement—at least for those companies who don't have a modeling team to create custom characters. Even for those that do, this tool would be a time

saver for generating new models for crowds or pre-viz material.

Basically, Evolver employs blend/morph techniques to allow the user to create 3D models of characters without resorting to modeling from scratch. In a normal CG pipeline, a modeler will build a 3D model of a character using the character designs (and other reference resources) or refine and optimize a model generated from a scan of a sculpture or a real person. In the case of a well-established animation house, they may already have a repository of 3D characters



that they can pull from. Evolver takes the concept of this last technique (reusing models) and puts it into an easy-to-use interface and streamlines the process.

Here's how it works: You have a choice of 48 different characters—this is the gene pool of ancestors in Evolver nomenclature. You have four open spots to fill in your evolution template. Pick two ancestors and put them in to the first two slots. The result will be a 50% hybrid between the two. A slider allows you to balance out how much of each ancestor you want in your new character. Pick two more ancestors and place them in the last two slots—balance to taste. In the center window, you will get a model head, which is the offspring of the four ancestors you have chosen. Yet, the magic doesn't end there. You can isolate how much of the ancestors show through different anatomical features, be it eyes, nose, jaw, cranium, ears and mouth. After a facial structure is selected (or even before), you choose between 14 texture maps for the skin tone.

That's all fine for the face, but what about

VISUAL EFFECTS

do's incomparable efforts to integrate itself into most production pipelines. The package utilizes FBX technology to import and export so it is compatible to Maya, Max, Lightwave and ZBrush out of the box. Not only have the developers paid attention to technical compatibility, they have also made sure that the needs of the artists are met on different levels. The interface and functionality are modifiable to the point of being liquid. Everything can be changed and customized. But what is great as a nod to the artist is that there are default preferences that match Maya and 3ds Max. So, an artist new to the program doesn't have to spend two days changing hot keys to match preferences. Finally, you have access to the program through scripting languages—not just one, but three—PERL, Lua and Python.

Now to the good stuff, the new features: They reworked the already advanced modeling features along with GL acceleration. The interface is zippy and responsive, even when the model starts to become heavy. Other modeling features include solid sketch-extrusion tools, which are great for branches, tentacles, etc. A MeshPaint tool provides a way to paint strokes or instanced geometry onto

the body? Well, that's the next step: Again, you have 48 body types to select from the gene pool with additional controls for the head to body proportions, the length of the neck, and the absolute height of the character in meters.

The mystical voodoo that is happening here occurs because the characters are pre-designed with the same topology. This means that they have the same number of vertices built in the same order. Users can blend or morph between these vertices—a point valued by all good animators. The same goes for the textures: since the topology of all the characters is the same, the UVs can also be the same, and as long as the maps have the right parts in the right places, it'll work for all the characters. Simple and sleek.

Lastly, one must also praise the true brilliance of the Darwin Dimensions business plan. The models aren't simply spit out for anyone to use (at least not in the Basic version). They are saved as a proprietary DDE format, which you e-mail to Darwin, and they will be Dr. Frankenstein and build the creature you designed. You will receive back a Maya-compatible model with texture UVs, 49 phoneme blend shapes, a skeleton with weighted skin, and a color, specular and bump map. You designate the resolution you want (Hi-rez, Med-rez, Low-rez or Crowd-rez). All for a service fee, which at the time of writing this article, has not yet been set in stone.

This is for the BASIC package which was the only one available by press date. The PRO package allows you to generate the models yourself. The COMPLETE package has the ability to use brand new characters that you have modeled, and place them into Evolver as an ancestor in the gene pool.

All in all a very unique and production-worthy tool—especially for game developers, pre-viz houses and vfx studios generating crowd animation where many characters have to be created with various levels of fidelity.

Website: www.darwindimensions.com

Price: t.c.

Next Limit's RealFlow 4

RealFlow has been the fluid simulator of choice for quite a few years now—at least for those companies that don't have a fleet of programmers and engineers to

write their own. I've been using it since version 1.3 came out many moons ago. Spanish developer Next Limit has finally gotten around to releasing version 4.0, and it looks to me like it has a new set of clothing. From the limited time I've had to work with it, it feels like it's been working out: The new release is stronger and faster than previous efforts. Since there's absolutely no way that I can touch on all of the enhancements and improvements in this short review, I'll touch on the main ones.

The interface design has been completely revamped and made to be customizable. As you may have seen through previous reviews, I'm a big proponent of giving users the ability to make their environment most comfortable for them. RealFlow now has modular windows



multiple monitors.

Methodology has been updated to make the default functionality more useful. In previous versions, one would have to create the fluid emitters and import geometry that it would be reacting with and establish the daemons (forces that influence the fluids). Then you would have to link them together in the scene hierarchy to allow them to know of each other's existence. In version 4, every time something is added to the scene, it will, by default, be part of the scene and interact with it unless you specifically tell it not to. This may sound like a small thing, but it saved hours of troubleshooting and backtracking to figure out whether everything was hooked up.

The largest change to RealFlow is that the designers have implemented the Python scripting language, broadening the possibilities for pipeline integration and custom expandability. You are able to launch batch simulations, write your own daemons, export particles to custom file formats and write

to provide custom layouts which can be saved and restored according to taste. The windows can also float, which I enjoy because you can span

your own fluid engine. The point is that the foundation for the dynamic calculations is there, and you use that as a launch point to expand the functionality to your own needs.

The internal dynamics engines have been souped up for faster simulations and quicker mesh calculations (which is when a mesh is created around the particle system to form a cohesive liquid), both being expanded to utilize multiple processors. If you decide to run RealFlow on a 64-bit Linux box rather than Windows, Next Limit has provided a 64-bit version of RF4. I can only drool at the prospect, simply because I don't have a 64-bit Linux box on hand.

Despite all the fluffy promotional buzz words, you have to take into consideration that fluid dynamics uses incredibly complex math, so calculations are inherently unstable and adjusting parameters could arbitrarily break the system. Although RealFlow does suffer from this, it has become more stable with each iteration, and this minor shortcoming doesn't keep all the major visual effects and animation studios from using it for production. However, that is no excuse not to use it if you are looking for nice fluid simulations. The price is not exorbitant, and Next Limit provides a demo version.

Website: www.nextlimit.com/realflow

Price: \$2,700 (Full License), \$2,000 (5 Command Package), \$900 (Upgrade); \$95 (Educational)

AJA's XENA 2K

The folks at AJA sent me their newest card, the XENA 2K, to do a little testing with it inside of a fancy schmancy BOXX system provided by Promax. I've worked with many playback systems, and in fact, have an AJA system with Final Cut Pro. But this new card is something impressive.

For one, we are talking about a PCIx card that manages to handle up to 2K playback utilizing the dual-linkHD pipe and a fast RAID. No breakout box is required (although it is optional if you like to have cool-looking ports in your equipment rack). The format is 4:4:4 HD-SDI, compatible with Sony HDCAM SR or Thompson Viper, 10-bit color depth and able to spit out 1080i, 1080p or 720p. It can also down convert to SD playback on the fly in

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Tech Review

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case your friends who are still in the Dark Ages need video format media.

The card itself is robust with a multi-pin port for its breakout cable which resembles an octopus with 13 I/O lines (8 XLR, 4 BNC, and an RS-422 for good measure). The SDI ports on the card are custom mini-BNCs that look like they could stand up to a three-year-old child with a pair of pliers. The custom cables jack into the mini-BNCs on the card side and end with standard BNCs to receive the SDI jacks on your equipment.

The supporting software and Codecs make the footage captured through the card readily accessible through Adobe Premiere Pro 2. Granted, Premiere is usually viewed as the red-headed stepchild of the non-linear editing family with Avid and Final Cut as the reigning champions. But, with hardware support like this, there isn't a really viable reason not to cut in Premiere—outside of the ubiquitous arguments "Well, it's just not as good!" or "Macs RULE!"—which are always compelling reasons. Premiere has had an extreme overhaul since the CS suites have been released and its compatibility with outside pipelines have been greatly enhanced. If you are using other Adobe systems at your shop, then you benefit from even greater compatibility.

AJA provides plug-ins for the major compositing programs, so After Effects, Combustion, Fusion and even Photoshop will all use the Codec so you can import the footage directly into the program. I'm sure that they would have supported Shake if Apple didn't, in its infinite wisdom, kill the PC version—only to kill the program as a whole. For capture and playback without the overhead of Premiere, AJA provides you with Machina, a handy little frame cyler with support for different color spaces as well as Look Up Tables (LUTs) so you can try to calibrate to the input device. It also has nice little additions such as multiple audio tracks and automatic addition of color bars and black for heads and tails.

The card itself is running about \$3,500, which in prosumer terms is nothing to sneeze

at, but if you compare it to the cost of renting studio time for HD layoff or shooting out to film every time you might have a final, there actually is no comparison. The investment is worth it, even if you consider the cost of the box you put it in and the RAID to support it.

We're truly getting close to an era where equipment is not the limitation in filmmaking—at any level. With gear like this, at these prices, post houses ought to look at the talent they have and strive to keep it—because that is going to be the only thing that separates them from some punk kid in Nebraska with a computer, a DV camera and a good idea.

Website: www.aja.com

Price: \$3,490

Adobe's Acrobat3D

Everyone savvy with the Internet is familiar with Acrobat and PDF files. The compactness and efficiency of the file format has made it the standard for sending files for print, review, standardized forms and almost



anything you can think of. Earlier this year, Adobe released Acrobat3D which has expanded the common features to include the ability to embed 3D files in documents that the end user can preview, swivel, make notes and give feedback to—all within the PDF file.

In the download package for Acrobat3D, you are provided with the Acrobat3D, Distiller, Designer and the 3D Toolkit.

In broad strokes, Distiller is used for converting documents of all kinds into PDF files, while Designer is a platform to create forms for questionnaires, standard forms and lots of other forms that don't interest animators much. The Acrobat3D Toolkit, however, is one of the key pipeline features to connect your favorite 3D program to Acrobat. It appears that Adobe has either acquired Right

Hemisphere, or purchased the right to use Deep Exploration with the toolkit—which, in my opinion, was a smart move.

As long as you have a licensed version of the 3D program(s) running on your system, the Toolkit will be able to browse through your 3D files will most standard display parameters including shading, wireframe, transparencies, etc., and you can move, rotate and zoom in and out. You also have the tools for batch conversion processes—which is absolutely essential for converting your files to the .u3d files that Acrobat needs. So, when you have created all your handy models in Maya or Max or AutoCAD, maybe, you can select them all within the ToolKit for mass conversion.

Once the model is imported into the PDF file you are creating, you can orbit around the model, change the display parameters, and have measurement tools. You can even setup a slice plane to create a cross-section of the model. Not only does the creator have control over these functions, but the client has them as well—if they also have the full Acrobat3D. Client notes can be embedded back into the file, even if only Reader is used, so feedback and versioning can be tracked with accuracy, saving both time and frustration.

We, in this industry, like to have this myopic view that tools are written and created for us to provide the world with beautiful animation. Acrobat3D is certainly part of that. Animation and post houses will gain plenty of use for delivering 3D content to clients for approval without the need for the client to have the 3D package that created it. It is also a benefit that Acrobat has security measures to protect sensitive intellectual content such as character designs. We gain these benefits, however, from the manufacturing industry, which the Acrobat3D format is really tailored to. In an industry where innovation and design keep the world moving (literally, and not metaphorically) the protection and efficiency that Adobe has brought to the table is, more than likely, immeasurable.

Website: www.adobe.com/products/acrobat3D

Price: \$995; \$495 (upgrade) ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor for Max Ink Cafe and Max Ink Productions. You can email him at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.



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Film still from "A Great Big Robot From Outer Space Ate My Homework" by VFS Animation grad Mark Shirra, winner of Best Student Production at the Leo Awards, now working for Pixar.

Feeding The Masses

Summer releases draw crowds with help from Massive software. **by Ryan Ball**

Directing and feeding armies of movie extras is becoming a thing of the past thanks to Academy Award-winning Massive software. The application was developed by Stephen Regelous for director Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* and has since become a time- and money-saving staple in many production pipelines. With the summer movie season wrapping up, we thought we'd catch up with some choice vfx shops to see how they ran Massive through its paces.

X-ing the Bridge

For the 20th Century Fox blockbuster *X-Men: The Last Stand*, Weta Digital was charged with destroying San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, but first they needed a way to populate it with cars, people and mutants.

"The benefit of using Massive was that we could get lots of action and interaction between people, mutants and cars with very little user difficulty," says visual effects supervisor Eric Saindon. "Prior to Massive, the shots would have had to be animated and the cars placed by hand. The mutants and people could have been done using an old particle system, but would have looked more like pinballs on the bridge rather than a crowd."

Saindon says Massive allowed Weta to deliver a large number of shots quickly with little manpower. "We came onto this shoot quite late, so we did not have much time to turn around 220 shots. With Massive we were able to set up the entire Golden Gate Bridge sequence and sim it out in one week."

As far as his wish list goes, Saindon tells us he'd like to see Massive pushed even further into the foreground of shots. "Adding things like facial

animation and high-quality hair simulations would help push it to the next level," he remarks.

Fast & Furious VFX

The team at Rhythm & Hues faced a unique challenge with Universal's *The Fast & the Furious: Tokyo Drift*. Since closing off streets for filming isn't allowed in Tokyo, a number of the location shots had to be created in CG with throngs of digital extras milling about to help sell the illusion.

Effects supervisor Dan Smiczek comments, "One of those things that you run into with CG is you sit and think about what's real, but then



TFATF: Tokyo Drift

when you're trying to reproduce it you come up with all these other ideas that you think are real. Then when you're looking at the real thing it's like, 'Wait, it doesn't really perform like that!'"

A big challenge, according to Smiczek, was having literally thousands of people walking directly at another thousand people. "Being able to get them to see each other coming and to kind of blend together, almost like you're knitting them, and just being able to have everyone passing next to each other without having really quick movements like they're trying to avoid each other really gives it that organic, real feel." He goes on to point out that they had to factor in the Japanese culture as they tend to keep much less personal space.

The shots had to look especially good since they were cut together with real footage shot in Tokyo's main square. Smiczek notes, "There was actually one shot we did where the bottom quarter of the frame was real pedestrians crossing Shibuya and we intercut in the CG Massive people. They're literally standing next to each other

and you can't pick it up. And that was really one of our main goals."

The French Renaissance

Fast cars and testosterone also play a big part in Millimages' *Renaissance*, a black-and-white, animated sci-fi thriller from French director Christian Volckman. Florent Delecourt, a Massive artist at Attitude Studio, says the shot that required the most preparation time is a car chase between Daniel Craig's character and a henchman voiced by Jonathan Pryce, which starts with a high-angle shot on the banks of the Seine in Paris.

"We had to give life to an entire neighborhood and create some car traffic. Massive was used to create almost all of the scene animation," notes Delecourt, who doesn't believe they could have pulled off the shot without Massive. "From a technical point of view, there would have been no other option than having a smaller crowd. We could have worked with MotionBuilder with several layers of ten motion-capture-integrated characters each. We also thought of using particle-driven instances to re-create traffic flow, but it wasn't going to be handy given the size and the complexity of the street network."

Attitude's supervising technical director, Olivier Renouard, tells us Massive's scalability was key for *Renaissance*, which required about 80 shots involving 100 to 500 characters each. "Massive could be seen as oversized for that kind of project, seeing the much larger crowds you often see it associated with," he comments. "However, we only needed one operator and five months to complete all the shots, and we did not need extra rendering or compositing work as would have been the case if we had to split the scenes in different layers. I think we could have expected about double that time with a smaller scale system, so it clearly saved us manpower and time."

Renaissance will have its North American debut on Sept. 22. Other fully animated productions to employ Massive recently include the Warner Bros. features *The Ant Bully*, which hits theaters on July 28, and *Happy Feet*, which is slated for a Nov. 17 release. ■



Renaissance



X-Men: The Last Stand

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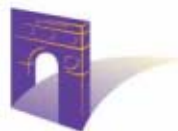
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As technology advances, the role of artist expands, particularly in digital imaging and design. These "new artists"—innovators who embody both aesthetic and virtual forms—work as designers, composers, and technologists in such areas as 3-D modeling, character animation, sound design, special effects, medical imaging, architectural visualization, broadcast design, and video game design. New York University's Center for Advanced Digital Applications (CADA), part of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (www.scps.nyu.edu), helps prepare students to pursue opportunities in these fields.

NYU CADA's faculty includes working animators, filmmakers, and artists, all adept at marrying theory and real world technique in their teaching. And, CADA's location in the heart of New York City, a center of digital activity, means students benefit in—and out of—the classroom from proximity to scores of production companies, such as RhinoFX, and Blue Sky Studios.

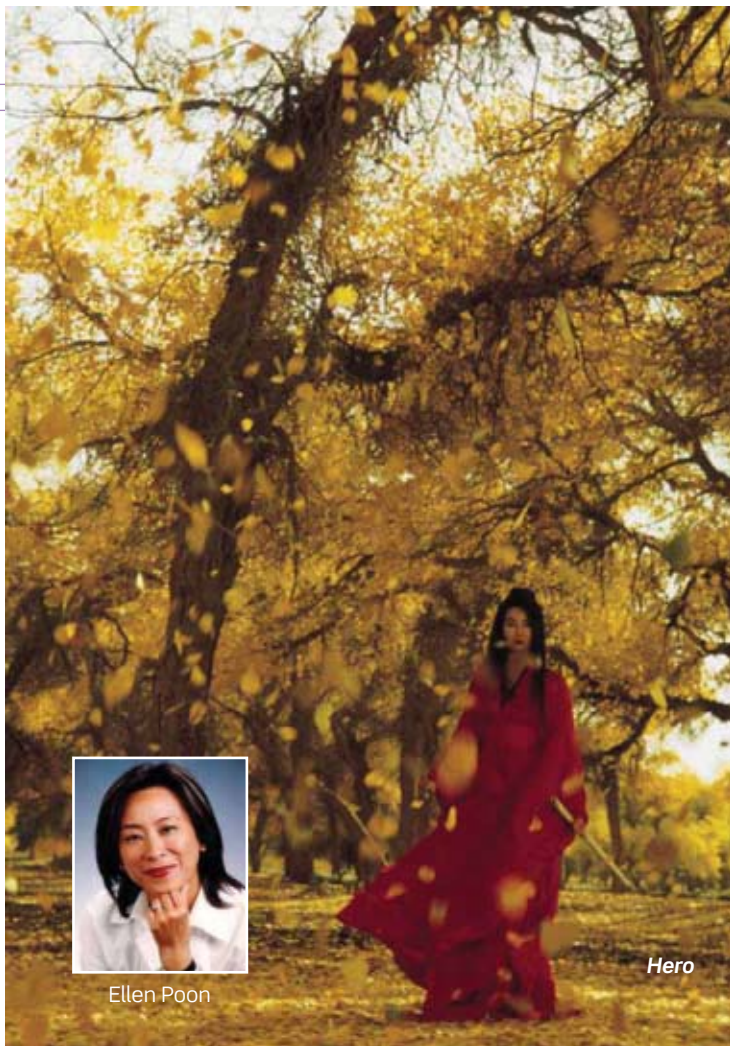


NYU offers several academic routes. Its M.S. in Digital Imaging and Design program emphasizes digital production tools and techniques in an applied, multidisciplinary curriculum. A view book and gallery of recent student work can be seen at www.scps.nyu.edu/digital.masters.

For those just wanting to explore the field or working professionals needing skills updates, NYU offers dozens of non-degree courses in animation, digital design and technology. Further, NYU has professional certificate programs in Animation, Modeling and Visual Effects Compositing.



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Ellen Poon

Hero



The Day After Tomorrow



Karen Goulekas

Effective Superwomen

More women are shattering the glass ceiling in the male-dominated field of vfx supervision.

by Barbara Robertson

VISUAL EFFECTS

“Women in visual effects? That will be a short story,” laughs Joanna Capitano visual effects producer and spokeswoman at Digital Domain. She has a point: Visual effects studios aren’t like the iron mines in *North Country*, but the ratio of women to men in these studios is little better than such male bastions as mining and construction. Consider the numbers of visual effects supervisors, for example. Although many vfx producers—the people who organize the production—are women, you could count the female vfx supes—the people who manage the work—on your fingers and toes, and you might not need your toes.

“A company usually has one,” says Betsy Paterson, referring to large studios. Paterson, the vfx supe for *Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties*, is one of five visual effects supervisors at Rhythm & Hues and the only female vfx supe. Although most studios have women working as vfx artists it’s even less likely that the smaller studios have female vfx supervisors.

“It’s still a boys’ club,” says Angela Elias, a senior technical director at Sony Pictures Imageworks. “On my lighting team, I’m the only woman in my group. Fifteen guys and me. But, with each project, I’m seeing more and more women.”

Why have so few women embraced visual effects? According to these women and others, it isn’t because there’s any hiring bias toward women. The scarcity of women vfx artists might simply reflect the general lack of women in any technical field, particularly ones involving computer science. According to the Computing Research Association, only 17 percent of the undergrad computer science degrees went to women in 2004, down from 19 percent in 2000. The growing number of women entering the field might reflect a general increased awareness of visual effects as more than robotic machines and boom boom explosions.

“I think it’s lack of exposure,” says Kristi Valk, a matte painter at The Orphanage for the past four years. “Before the Internet and before DVD commentaries, I think a lot of women, including me, didn’t know matte painting existed. But the tide is changing.”

Valk’s colleague at the “O,” compositor Natalie Nolan, adds, “My perception was that visual effects is a very technical job; that you’d sit at a computer all day and make space ships blow up. But, my job is more about art.”

So, how did these women and others find their way into visual effects studios? What all

these women and others we interviewed have in common is an initiative, driving ambition, willingness to work hard, technical as well as artistic expertise and a thirst for knowledge and new challenges. They are fearless risk takers and love what they’re doing.

Nolan was ignoring her fine arts degree while toiling in an IT department, and then a friend taught her how to use Comotion and After Effects. She quit her job for a three-week roto gig. The “gig” has lasted for three years.

Valk studied illustration at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, but also took visual effects classes. “They didn’t have a matte painting focus,” she says, “so I took landscape painting, Photoshop classes, and compositing.” And that helped her land an internship.

Sonja Burchard, a compositing supervisor at Digital Domain, poured through job lists at a library looking for something that combined her love of logic and art, and discovered computer graphics. “I knew it would be harder to get into the creative side, so I started with programming,” she said. On her own, she learned 3D Studio and the Unix-based

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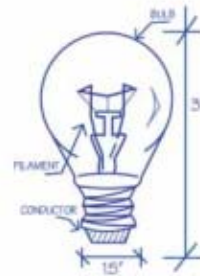
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VFX Women

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compositing software, Wavefront Composer, which she borrowed from a friend. With that, she created a compositing demo that earned her a spot on the *Titanic* team.

For Katie Cole, a digital animator at Sony Pictures Imageworks, the film *The Abyss* was the catalyst. "I wanted to make that face that came out of the water," she says. "I didn't know what to do. All I knew was that I needed to learn Unix. I just packed my suitcase and moved to California." During grad school at the Academy of Art, she and 10 students created a film that won awards at SIGGRAPH and Sundance, and Cole was hired by LucasFilm to work on previz for *Star Wars: Episode II*.

Karen Goulekas was visual effects supervisor on *The Day After Tomorrow* and is now in pre-production with director Roland Emmerich on *10,000 B.C.* She was running a studio camera in a TV station in 1984 when she discovered a 3D computer from Dubner.

"No one else wanted to learn it, but you couldn't peel me away," she says. She mastered that machine, moved on to others, and worked anywhere she could, day and night, mostly on commercials. "I couldn't get enough of it," she says. In 1992, Goulekas took a pay cut to move to Los Angeles where she worked at Boss Films, and then Digital Domain and Centropolis. Now, she's on her own. "I could have stayed in the safety zone, but that doesn't fit my personality," she says.

Similarly, Ellen Poon, now senior director of

art production at Electronic Arts, discovered computer graphics and 3D animation in the early days while working on a Ph.D. in computer science. She taught herself how to create effects.

"I believe in being ahead of the curve," she says. "I didn't limit myself to one thing. I learned everything—modeling, animation, lighting, compositing, the whole Unix platform." Once she mastered the tools, she cooked up a job at MPC in London, then Rushes, and she moved to ILM in 1990. In 1998, she was co-visual effects supervisor on *Small Soldiers*; the following year, she supervised *The Green Mile*. She left ILM to start her own company to supervise effects for *Hero*. "I want to do something new all the time," she says. "That keeps me going."

So, has it been smooth sailing for the artists once they got inside? Not necessarily. The boys' club can be tough.

"I had to learn to fight harder," says Eliasz. "Women have to learn to step out of their natural instincts and toughen up and learn that it's



Betsy Paterson

Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties

all about the shot."

A sign above Lindy DeQuattro's desk at ILM reads, "You say I'm a bitch like that's a bad thing." DeQuattro has moved from sequence supervisor, to TD, to CG supervisor to, on *The Chronicles of Narnia*, associate visual effects supervisor. "You have to be confident and take the reins and make people follow you," she says.

Poon deals with the possibility of bias against women by shoving it to the side. "I assume it's not there," she says. "If you do the work that you think is the highest possible standard, why would anyone discriminate against you? That's the only way to combat that kind of bad behavior."

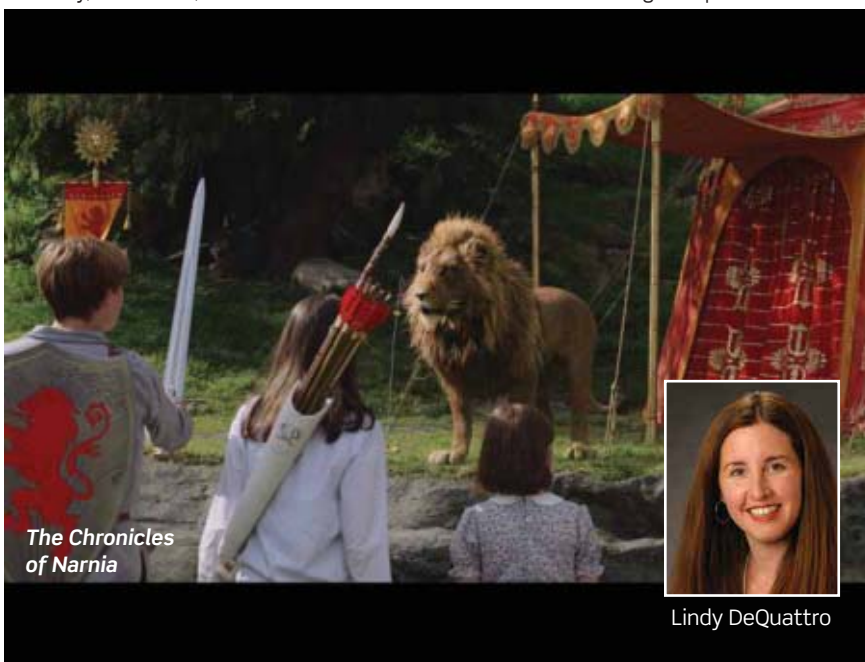
So what advice do these successful women have for others who want to enter the field? "Figure out what you love to do, and do it," says Paterson.

"Take a chance," says Apryl Knobbe, texture and matte paint process supervisor at ImageWorks. "Every time I took a risk, it panned out. And you can't be afraid to learn. Once you stop learning, you stop growing and become a dinosaur in the industry."

"Brush up on your programming," says DeQuattro, associate visual effects supervisor at ILM. "Everyone assumes women have the creative touch. What they're going to be critical about are the technical skills. I honestly believe you have to be better than most of the men to get the same treatment."

And, perhaps most important: "Don't give up," says Renee Binkowski, lead texture painter at Tippet Studio. "It takes hard work and tenacity, but the opportunities are there." ■

VISUAL EFFECTS



The Chronicles of Narnia

Lindy DeQuattro




'Lunny vs Spider' - courtesy of Andy Spence, BA (Hons) Computer Animation.

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Finding Spidey's Future Web Casters

Digital pros train future boffins through Sony Pictures Imageworks' effective IPAX program. **by Evelyn Jacobson**

The jump from academics to the real world of vfx and animation work is just a little bit easier these days for students at some of the country's top animation and technology schools, thanks to a program spearheaded by Sony Pictures Imageworks, the Academy Award-winning visual effects and character animation studio behind *Spider-Man 2*, *Monster House* and next year's *Ghost Rider* and *Spider-Man 3*.

The Imageworks Professional Academic Excellence program, known as IPAX, brings the education community closer to the production environment through outreach programming aimed at faculty in the effort to develop future talent. IPAX components include on-site fellowships and in-house training sessions for professors at Imageworks, who return to the classroom to share the acquired knowledge with students. The program also helps with the structuring of coursework by providing curricula review and guidance.

Imageworks, which is home to one of the industry's most respected in-house training and artist development programs, spearheaded the initiative after meeting with academics to help solve the dilemma of constantly evolving tools and techniques that schools face when attempting to simulate complex proprietary "pipelines." IPAX is less about demystifying or distributing software technology—although Imageworks is working with vendors to provide IPAX schools with software and hardware in the near future – and more about teaching professors the latest production processes, from naming conventions to how to communicate with production

team members. "Processes are important to how a job gets done," says Imageworks president Tim Sarnoff. "The communication link between people drives the greatest return. What they're learning is how to communicate well with one another and that's a bit of education that doesn't change no matter what software or platform you're working on."

During their fellowships at Imageworks, instructors are essentially treated and trained as new hires and then assigned to a project the studio is working on. And, while working on the next summer blockbuster adds to a professor's cachet and credibility in the classroom, they're taking back information that will enable students to integrate more easily into first jobs in their chosen field.

"It's been a very valuable collaboration for us," says Richard Weinberg, a professor of computer animation at USC, who spent three weeks at Imageworks last year and shadowed the production of *Monster House*. "The world of animation and visual effects evolves so rapidly it's useful to be in close contact with Imageworks and find out what types of approaches they're taking to their large-scale production."

The program started in 2005 with six charter schools and now has eight on its prestigious roster, including DePaul University Computer Graphics and Animation Program, Gnomon School of Visual Effects, Otis College of Art + Design, Pratt Institute School of Art and Design, Ringling School of Art & Design, University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television, Stanford University, and Carnegie-Mellon

University. Schools must reapply to be part of IPAX on a yearly basis.

An additional component to IPAX is a scholarship program, which in its first round this year has presented \$50,000 in scholarships to six students currently enrolled at IPAX academic institutions.

Scholarship recipients are Ale-na Bejenaroli of Gnomon School of Visual Effects; Tony Cabrera of Ringling School of Art and Design; Amy Hitt of DePaul University School of Computer Science, Telecommunications and Informations Systems; Ji Young Kim of Pratt Institute; Emmanuel Osei-Kuffour of Stanford University; and Vidal Perez of the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television.

"We're awarding the top students with an opportunity to reduce whatever financial burden they have so they are more likely to go into the industry in the future," says Sarnoff. "The whole premise is if we can bring the top of the top into the industry, the industry will benefit and my company will benefit."

The scholarships help students not only with tuition, but with the purchase of materials for projects, which for Vidal Perez, an MFA candidate at USC, makes his thesis project possible. "I have to stay an extra year to finish my thesis and I wanted to do a combination of stop motion and CG in my film, now I can use the money for tuition and [stop motion] materials and I'm really happy," he says.

And ultimately, what's good for the students and schools is good for the industry's companies.

"We had immediate success that we didn't expect in terms of being able to hire the right people," says Sande Scoredos, executive director of training and development at Imageworks. "A professor who did a fellowship went back and knew what we were looking for and sent over the perfect person for a particular job. That's happened several times now so that's been great, and that's exactly what we want." ■

For more info, visit www.sonypictures.com/imageworks/ipax/index.php.



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STRAIGHT TO THE FAST LANE: 2006 ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY GRADS BEGIN CAREERS WITH TOP ANIMATION FIRMS

With the dust still settling after this year's Spring Show Industry Preview, Academy of Art University, San Francisco graduates have already been offered internships and positions as character animators, modelers, composers and concept artists at Pixar, Sony, Giant Killer Robots, Dreamworks, Ocean VFX, Electronic Arts and Walt Disney.

Each year, Academy of Art University is host to a gathering of the Animation Industry's brightest stars, influentials and talent scouts. The occasion for this unique convergence is the Academy's 2006 Spring Show Industry Preview, an annual gathering that showcases the very best Academy BFA and MFA creative output.

Among the agencies on hand to interview and hire 2006 students and graduates were representatives from companies that included Warner Brothers Animation, Walt Disney, Blue Sky Studios, Electronic Arts, PDI/Dreamworks, Rhythm & Hues Studios, Pixar and others.

In a comment that was indicative of the overall quality of student output and Academy instruction, Robbie Robfogel, President of Ocean Visual FX, stated, "Thanks again for everything. There are a number of students good enough to bring on board now. If you ever need me for anything that involves the Academy again, if there is anything I can do, just ask. I'm there."



The School of Animation and Visual Effects at the Academy of Art University, under the leadership of Chris Armstrong, Director of 3D Animation, and Sherrie Sinclair, Director of 2D Animation, emphasizes strong traditional skills and storytelling abilities, both of which are then applied to digital technology. Classes focus on one of the main areas of the Animation Industry which include: Visual Effects, Games, 3D Modeling, Character Animation, Storyboarding, Visual

Development, and 2D Layout and Background Painting. Emphasis is placed on creating a professional quality demo reel and/or portfolio following industry standards. Upon graduation the student artist is well-equipped to enter the workforce in a number of positions.

For the past ten years Chris Armstrong has worked at ILM as a senior and lead animator on over a dozen feature films including The Mask, Lost World, Mars Attacks, Flubber and Men in Black II, as well as animation supervisor on Galaxy Quest and Star Wars Episode II.

Sherrie H. Sinclair worked for a decade as an animator with Walt Disney Feature Animation. Ms. Sinclair's film credits include The Lion King, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tarzan, and Lilo and Stitch

About the Academy of Art University, San Francisco

Founded in 1929 by artists for artists, the Academy of Art University is the largest private accredited private institution of higher education offering professional study at the AA, BFA and MFA levels in the fields of art and design. The curriculum integrates the talents of students with their personal visions and aspirations with the overarching goal of preparing them for professional employment in art and design careers.

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Image by Eva Kolenko, BFA Photography

Disney's *Meet the Robinsons*

Making the Animation Cut

Studio recruitment specialists say it's a good time to be getting into the industry no matter how you slice it.

by Sarah Gurman

If you're planning on spending all three days of SIGGRAPH camped out at the job fair, you'll be happy to know that the animation job climate just keeps getting hotter. This summer alone, there were five majortoon releases in addition to the effects heavy blockbusters *Superman Returns* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* keeping animators in demand at the big studios. "Well I've heard that there's 17 animated feature films in the works that will be released within the next two years," Mainframe Entertainment modeling department head Larry DeFlorio notes. "That's an awful lot of work."

Mainframe has certainly kept its animators busy with series like *Beat Freaks* and cranking out direct-to-DVD features such as *Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia* and *Arthur's Missing Pal* (which gives Marc Brown's beloved aardvark a CG face-lift). "The market is very hot for strong artists at the moment, that's why you're seeing so much movement from studio to studio, everyone's poaching each other," DeFlorio says.

DreamWorks' head of human resources Kathy Mandato explains that there is an ebb and flow between different studios' production needs. "When one studio is finished with a movie, another one is beginning, so it does release some talent into the marketplace

that we can then take advantage of." However, Mandato points out that DreamWorks is always looking for new talent because between PDI and the Glendale facility, the studio usually has multiple projects in production at the same time. "It doesn't look like it's going to slow down," she says. "I mean there are lots of movies, a lot more people in the space than there used to be and a lot more companies competing for the attention of candidates." Right now, DreamWorks is looking to fill quite a few positions for its upcoming CG features *Bee Movie* and *Kung Fu Panda*. Mandato tells us that the studio is pretty much hiring across the board, but is especially seeking out effects animators and lighters.

More traditional job seekers will be glad to hear that there are non-CG opportunities out there. Portland's Laika Entertainment (formerly Will Vinton Studios) is currently building a state-of-the-art feature film animation campus set to open in 2008 with



Modeling department head Larry DeFlorio and designer Sheila Turner check the color palette on a Barbie scene at Mainframe.

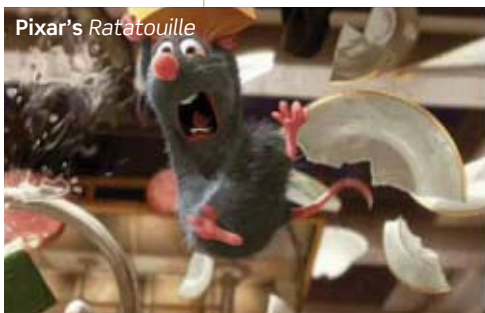


Nik Ranieri, supervising animator on *Buck Cluck*, tweaks a scene for Disney's *Chicken Little*.

buildings dedicated to both CGI and stop-motion. The studio is gearing up for production on two feature projects, *Coraline*, a stop-motion adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel for children, and the CG *Jack & Ben* movie. "We're working in basically every medium that one can work in, so we're actually always looking for people," Laika's senior recruiter Tom Knott explains. The multi-faceted toon house also has a commercial arm that produces 2D, 3D and stop-mo spots. "Between now and this time next year we have to hire 400 people for these films and our commercial side, which is booming," Knott says.

Although there has been several news items about Disney's plans to reduce its movie studio workforce and the number of films it produces each year, interim head of Walt Disney Feature Animation Don Hahn says, "We're always looking for great people, and it's highly competitive. We're not particularly stacking up with dozens and doz-

OPPORTUNITIES

Pixar's *Ratatouille*

Laika house director Gabe Springer works on the award-winning *Coca-Cola Rivalries* spot.



From top, lighting artist Igor Lodeiro, character technical director lead Nicolas Scapel and supervising animator John Hill put in some *Over the Hedge* time for DreamWorks.

with the technical knowledge on top of that."

And for those who join the Mouse's team and need to bring some of their skills up to speed, the studio has an internal artistic development and training program known as the Disney Academy. "We have all kinds of creative classes to help people refine or maintain their traditional skills," Le Cam says, "and then on top of that we also provide all kinds of software and technical classes. New members of the Disney animation staff have to obtain their "digital citizenship" when they first come on board, which introduces the studio's pipeline and tool sets. Additional classes providing a more in-depth look at specific tool sets are available to those who need to develop certain skill areas for their job.

All of the studios we spoke with have or are in the process of developing artistic and technical training programs. Laika's program will get into full swing with classes and mentorships as the new studio's construction finishes up and the heavy hiring begins. For DreamWorks, their training system really started to gel when the Glendale studio switched from 2D to CG four years ago and their artists needed to transition to

the new medium. "Simultaneously we began an outreach program where we went into schools and brought out what we think is the best talent to start in the company and that required that those people are able to go through a training program," Mandato says.

Stan Szymanski, SVP of digital production at Sony Pictures Imageworks notes, "We offer a mix of core facility software training, production-specific software training and long-term career growth training opportunities." Imageworks SVP of animation production Barry Weiss adds, "You should be coming in already conversant with the core commercial software that we utilize." Sony Pictures Animation, a division of Sony Pictures Digital, is set to release its first full-length CG fea-



DreamWorks' *Bee Movie*

ture *Open Season* in September, and the crew is now toiling away on its second feature, the wave-catching penguin mockumentary, *Surf's Up*.

So what's the best way to land a spot on a major studio's animation team? "It's better just to have a strong short reel than a weaker longer reel," Knott says. "Do your research before you apply for a job and find out whether the studio is hiring, what productions they're working on, a little background on the studio, that sort of thing." Knott also adds that it's great to have a website to direct potential employers to, especially for character designers and storyboard artists.

If you want to join one of the big studios, it's important to define yourself skill-wise and artistically. "Be clear on what type of position you are looking for when you apply to a larger studio," Weiss says. "We generally are looking for specific skill sets as opposed to generalists." However, Weiss also advises not to pigeon-hole yourself in terms of the work you take on. "Be open creatively to the type of shows that are being offered to you. You limit yourself professionally when you are only looking for a specific type of creative experiences."

The experts agree that networking and being proactive is also a key element in the job-hunting process. Hahn says, "I would tell people coming out of college in particular that you'll never get hired on your first interview of your first contact, but it's like fishing, you have to keep your hook in the water and keep your portfolio and your contact out there."

In the end, it seems, it's persistence, showing a dedication to the medium and a willingness to refine your skills, that will make employers give you a second look. DeFlorio explains, "We're looking for people who have a deep-rooted need to draw, design and animate, the ones that have the need to create in their blood." ■



DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda*

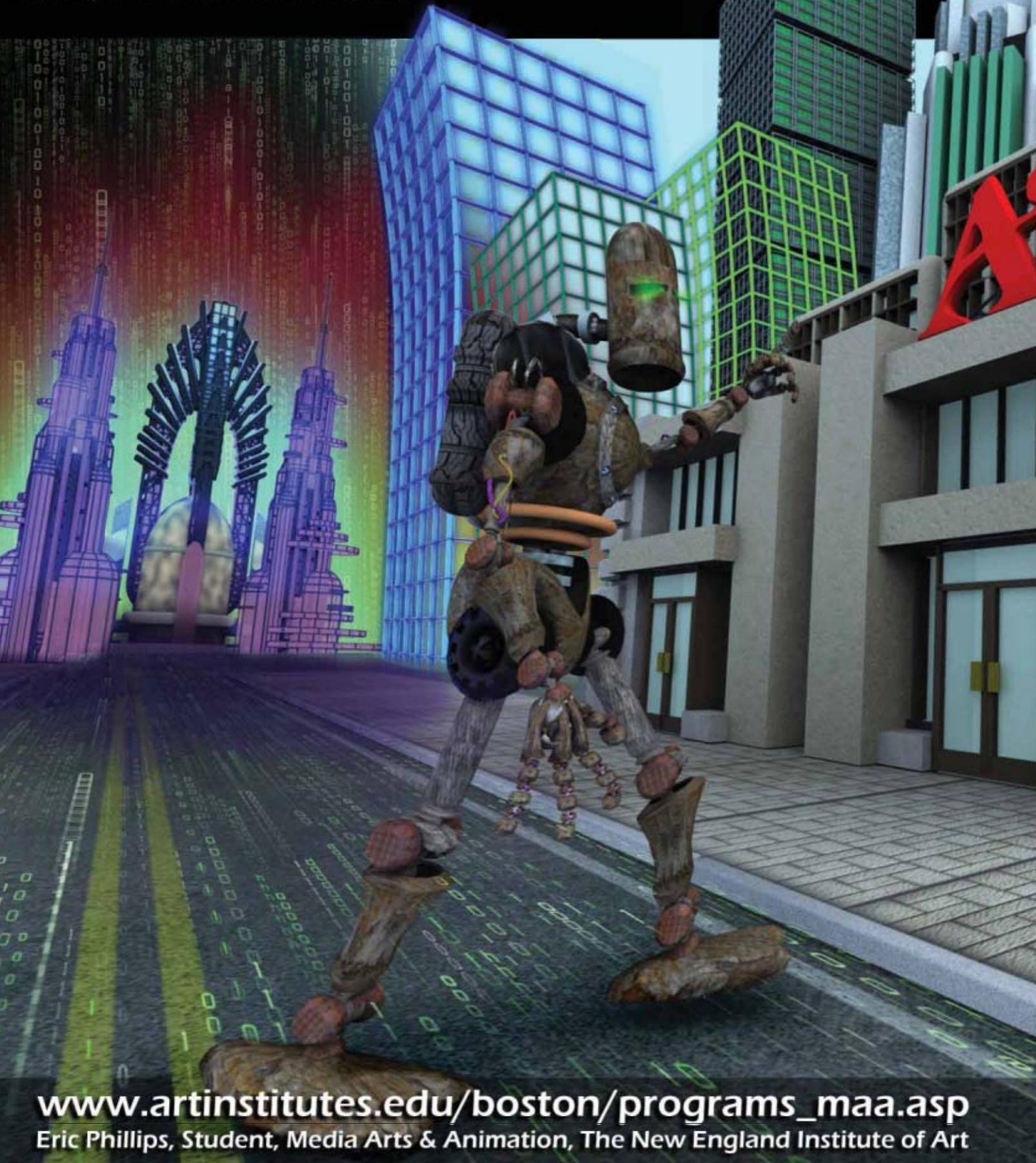
ens of jobs, but I think if there's somebody outstanding out there in the world, we're always looking for the best talent." On the heels of *Pirate's of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest's* record-setting performance at the box office, Disney's Pixar relationship offers promising upcoming animated releases like *Meet the Robinsons* and *Ratatouille* that will let the studio's artists have fun while they're burning the midnight oil.

Disney's VP of human resources Ann Le Cam explains that the studio likes to see a solid grasp of artistic fundamentals in potential job candidates. "What we definitely are looking for is people that have traditional animation skills and drawing skills in most of the visual areas so that they have strong foundations that we can build on

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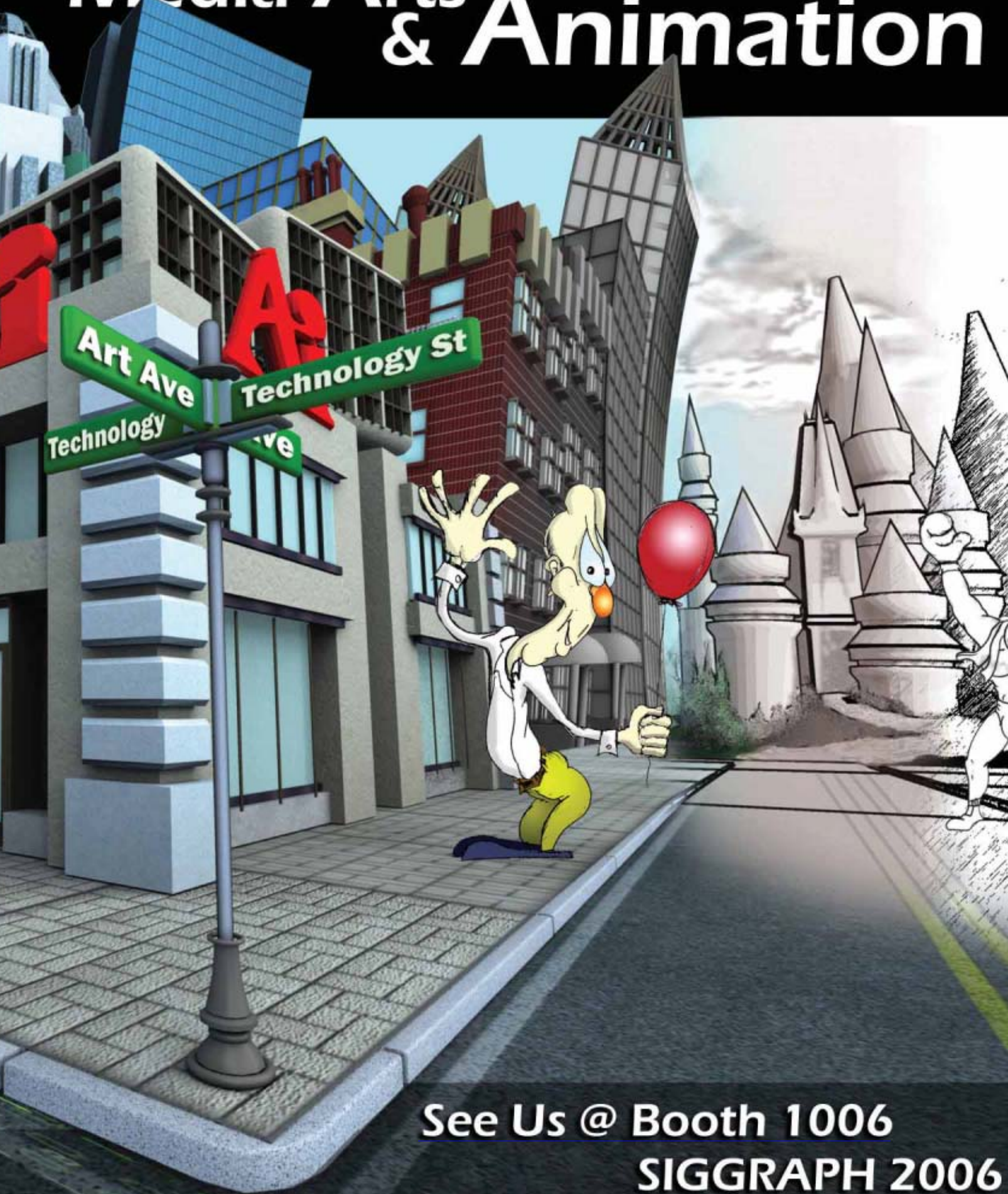
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Eric Phillips, Student, Media Arts & Animation, The New England Institute of Art

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Adventures in the Toon Trade

Blue's Clues animation director David B. Levy's new book offers tasty tips on making it in the business.

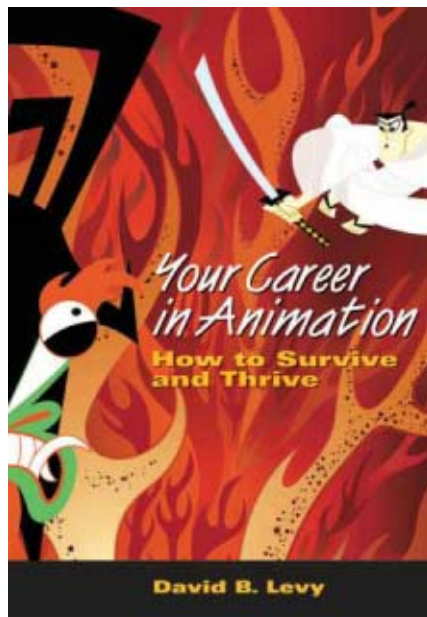
by Jake Friedman

We have all read animation books that require a few highlighted paragraphs. Now comes a book that deserves to be printed on highlighted pages. Stuffed to the gills with information like the other publications from Allworth Press, David Levy's *Your Career in Animation: How to Survive and Thrive* is the most straightforward book on the subject of the biz ever printed.

"So much of the stuff we go through in our careers we may not experience until we're a few years in," says Levy. "I wanted to write a guide for those trying to get the most out of their career so that they may navigate difficult and challenging situations as successfully as possible."

For this guide, Levy, an animation director, college instructor and president of ASIFA-East, interviewed 100 professionals all across the animation spectrum. The book contains a wide assortment of advice and experience from character animators to producers to designers, from recent graduates to established directors. There are tips from Oscar-darlings like John Canemaker, independent studio heads like Michael Sporn and hit network TV-show creators like *Codename: Kids Next Door's* Tom Warburton. Reading the book gives you a window into the industry in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Canada and, most significantly New York, Levy's home base.

Levy got the idea for the book when he started teaching a course at New York's School of Visual Arts on the very subject of succeeding in the animation business. "As I started making the syllabus, it felt like a chapter listing to me. It was a 'eureka' moment. I immediately started to come up with a



book pitch; I felt that I had enough experience where my story could be a good focal point for a book like this. I've had enough success already, and I've made enough mistakes that I could pass along to the reader for instructional purposes."

The anecdotal blunders that Levy describes in his book are the really tasty bits. In reading these stories, the reader feels like he's sitting with the author and contributors listening to the secrets of the industry. In its candidness, the book harkens back to Shamus Culhane's *Talking Animals and Other People* but treats itself more as a guidebook than a memoir. With chapters like "Making On-the-Job Criticism Your Friend," "Surviving Unemployment" and "Networking: People Who Need People," the author goes through the do's and don'ts by example, showing how regular folks do the job right or wrong.

Levy's tips on networking are per-



David B. Levy

haps one of the pillars of the book. He encourages people to get personal in their networking attempts. "Everything in the book goes back to the fact

that it's a people business, it's about relationships at the end of the day. As animation artists, there are so few of us who will have a job at a studio that's going to last more than a few years in a row. When you look back at a 30-, 40-year career, the relationships you've made are probably going to matter more than any one particular project you worked on."

For instance, Levy reveals what he considers a top trade secret about interviewing. "The thing that I'm encouraging people to do most is the informational interview, a strategy which is really most important to people just breaking into the industry, and I'm suggesting not to hide behind sending out e-mails, resumes and reels, or going to websites that are listing job postings. What I'm suggesting is starting with relationships first. Getting out there to meet and connect with real people to show off yourself and your work."

While the book does give advice for rookies who need to meet people, the book gives equal attention to established professionals with its chapters on pursuing independent animation, starting a studio business and pitching a pilot. It's the kind of book that one will continue taking off the shelf and re-reading countless times during different career stages. While the business of animation may be ever-changing, the book is a navigation tool through the different relationships that pop up in the industry. That quality gives the book a timeless relevancy.

Adds Levy, "For me, the bulk of the book is really about what happens year five, ten, twenty and thirty of your career and how we can constantly ensure that we have the best chance for success, no matter where we set our goals. That, to me, is the key to this book." ■

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Characters Rule at AnimationMentor.Com

by Ellen Wolff

Walking the halls at SIGGRAPH '06, you might see a gaggle of (mostly) young animators wearing T-shirts promoting AnimationMentor.Com, a character animation school launched last spring. It shouldn't come as a surprise if these students look happy hanging together. Most of the time, they interact via live webcam classes and chat rooms because AnimationMentor.Com is strictly an *online* school. So SIGGRAPH presents a perfect opportunity for them to connect in person.

"Last year at SIGGRAPH a huge group of us met for the first time," recalls student Aja Bogdanoff. "It felt like we'd known each other forever even though we'd never been in the same room before."

Bogdanoff, who's a Cornell graduate living in Ithaca, New York, was amazed that an A.M. student she'd never met offered to pick her up at L.A.'s airport and provide a couch to crash on. Bogdanoff plans to attend the Animation Mentor activities at this year's SIGGRAPH—activities that include a "Birds of a Feather" meeting and presentations in Maya's booth on the convention floor.

Those presentations demonstrate the school's unique approach. When Bobby Beck (ex-Pixar), Shawn Kelly (ILM) and Carlos Baena (Pixar) envisioned how working professionals could be online mentors to aspiring animators, they cut right to the chase. Their program would be *all* about character animation. As Kelly explains, "We provide the modeling and rigging of Maya-generated characters so that students can focus on the principles of animation." While some students work in Softimage, or even pencil or stop-motion, most work with the Maya models that the school provides.

"They've created adaptable and scalable character rigs that we can use for our short films," says student Barry

Smith, who logs on to A.M. classes in the evening after work. "First you start off with a bouncing ball, then a ball with a tail, then one leg and then two." Visitors to the site will notice a distinct humor in the names given to different animation examples—like "the uppity double-bounce walk."

The A.M. curriculum is divided into six 12-week quarters, and after 18 months, graduates are awarded a diploma in Advanced Studies in Character Animation, which is recognized by the State of California. While AnimationMentor.Com is headquartered in Berkeley and most of its 51 mentors live in North America, 40% of the school's 464 students log on to classes from 41 countries. The 18-month program costs \$14,275.

Kelly, who oversees the curriculum, admits, "It can be tricky juggling live webcam classes across multiple time zones. We try to have mentors of international students group their interactive Q&A sessions at odd times, or later in the evening." California-based student Barry Smith remarks, "I've had people in my classes from England, India, Venezuela and Ireland. Sometimes it's tough for them." It's not unheard of for students in Asia to get up at 3 a.m. to attend a Q&A session. "That happens all the time," says Kelly. "They're so passionate and dedicated."

In the live Q&A sessions a mentor typically



interacts with 10 to 15 students. "Basically it's videoconferencing with webcams," says Kelly. "A student can see and hear the mentor and be seen by him and the rest of the class." Current mentors have impressive pedigrees, working at studios like Pixar, ILM, PDI, DreamWorks, Disney, Sony Imageworks, Blur, Blue Sky, Nelvana, Rhythm & Hues, Digital Domain and Tippett Studio.

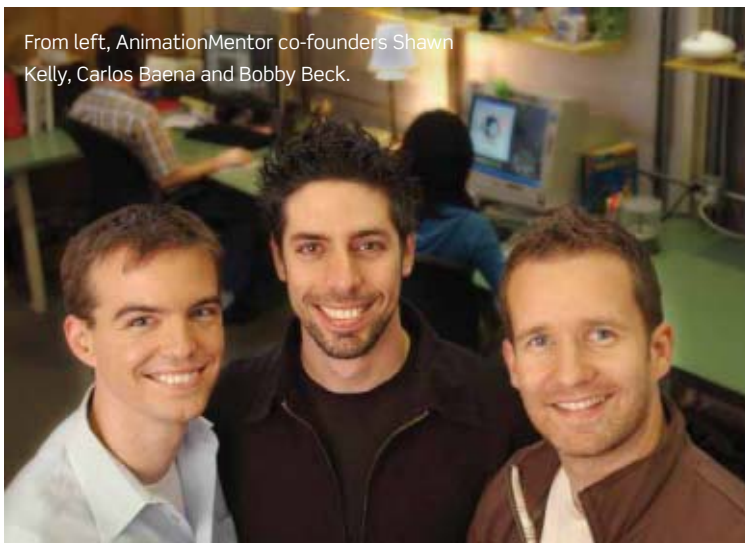
The curriculum also contains video lectures and assignments that students can access whenever they wish. They can watch videotaped lectures from animators like Pete Docter (*Monsters, Inc.*) and Eric Darnell (*Madagascar*) and see demonstrations about specific animation topics.

A.M.'s primary goal, however, is to provide extensive feedback to students, and it uses a proprietary tool called eCritiques in which a mentor appears on one half of the screen and a student's animation appears in the other. The mentor can mark up the images, frame-by-frame, and offer suggestions. The system also allows fellow students to add comments—and they do, offering each other encouragement and ideas. "As social as we've made it," observes Kelly, "I'm still shocked at how much peer feedback there is among students."

Which may be why SIGGRAPH feels, as Aja Bogdanoff puts it, "Like a family reunion." This will be Aja's last SIGGRAPH as an A.M. student—she's among the 133 students in this September's inaugural graduating class. Another 109 are expected to graduate in January. Some even have jobs waiting for them, and Kelly acknowledges, "We get calls all the time from studios. They're chomping at the bit." ■

For more info, visit www.animationmentor.com.

From left, AnimationMentor co-founders Shawn Kelly, Carlos Baena and Bobby Beck.



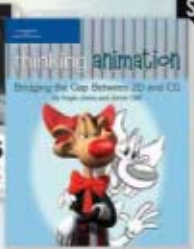
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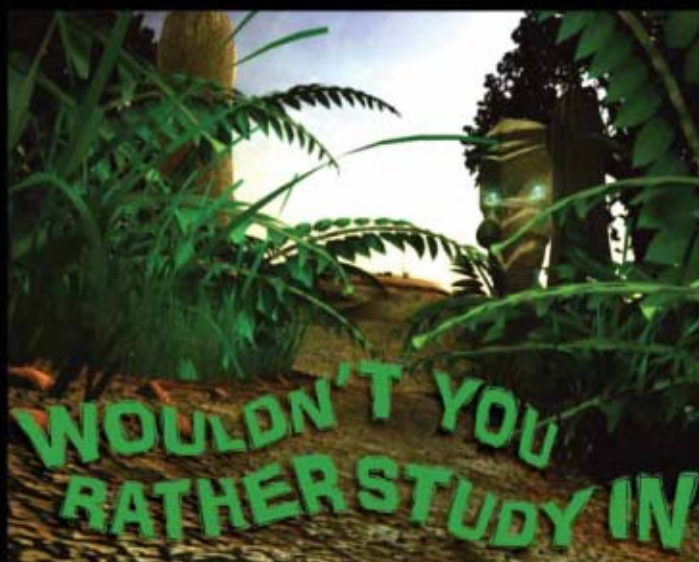
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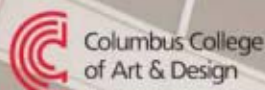


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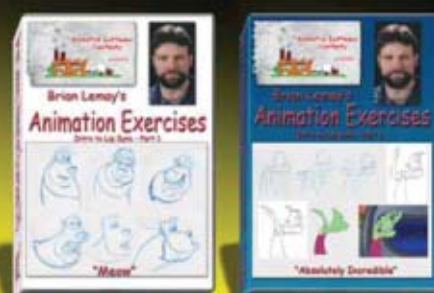
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Image from "Vaudeville" by Chansoo Kim

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FESTIVALS

Event	Date	Place	Website
SIGGRAPH	Aug. 1-3	Boston, MA	www.siggraph.org
Wizard World Chicago	Aug. 3-6	Chicago, IL	www.wizarduniverse.com
The San Francisco Animation Convention	Aug. 4-6	San Francisco, CA	www.aodsf.org
Crested Butte Festival	Aug. 9-13	Crested Butte, CO	www.crestedbuttereelfest.com
Building Blocks 2006	Aug. 15-17	San Jose, CA	www.digitalhollywood.com/BuildingBlocks.html
Edinburgh Int'l Film Festival	Aug. 16-28	Edinburgh, U.K.	www.edfilmfest.org.uk
Montreal World Film Festival	Aug. 25- Sept. 4	Montreal, Canada	www ffm-montreal.org/en_index.html
Telluride IndieFest	Aug. 30-Sept. 3	Telluride, CO	www.tellurideindiefest.com
Canadian National Expo	Sept.. 1-3	Toronto, Canada	www.canadiannationalexpo.com
Anime Festival	Sept. 1-4	Dallas, TX	www.animefest.org
Telluride Film Festival	Sept. 1-4	Telluride, CO	www.telluridefilmfestival.com
Bitfilm Mobile Multimedia Forum	Sept. 7-8	Ha.m.burg, Germany	www.bitfilm.com/festival/m3forum.php
Casual Ga.m.es Conference	Sept. 7-8	Austin, Texas	www.CasualGa.m.esConference.com
Toy & Ga.m.e Inventor's Forum (TGIFCon)	Sept. 7-9	Orlando, FL	www.tgifcon.com
Toronto Int'l Film Festival for Children	Sept. 7-16	Toronto, Canada	www.e.bell.ca/filmfest
IBC	Sept 9-13	A.m.sterda.m., Netherlands	www.ibc.org
Flashforward Film Festival	Sept. 11-14	Austin, TX	www.flashforwardconference.com
CTIA Wireless I.T. & Entertainment	Sept. 12-14	Los Angeles, CA	www.wirelessit.com
Madcat Women's Int'l Film Festival	Sept. 13-27	San Francisco, CA	www.madcatfilmfestival.org
Atlantic Film Festival	Sept. 14-23	Halifax, Nova Scotia	www.atlanticfilm.com

In the Next Issue of



★ **Sony's *Open Season* Unleashes More CG Animals!**

★ **All You Need to Know About TV Animation Buyers.**

★ **Pitching Toons at Cartoon Forum '06**

★ **Fall TV Preview**

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We were thrilled to have director **Moto Sakakibara** (*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, next year's *Gon* movie) give us a tour of his awesome L.A.-based **Sprite Animation Studios**. Sprite's six-minute short *Monster Samurai* unspooled at the Annecy Festival a few months ago and will be participating in the Electronic Theater at SIGGRAPH.



3:00 p.m.: One man's trash is another man's treasure.
"Sometimes the greatest ideas are casually thrown away."
"Gee Moto, do you have to go through my trash everyday?"



8:30 - 9:30 a.m.: A picture of my commute.
"Traffic nightmare gives me inspiration"



4:30 p.m.: Acting out fight scenes with art director Tatsuro Maruya.m.a.
"POW! THWACK! KA-BOOM!"
"Oh, master please have mercy"



6:30 p.m.: What's in here?
"Does the COO have to take inventory of the fridge everyday?"



9:45 a.m.: Welcome to Sprite Animation.
"Ummm? You know that I'm the president of this company, right?"



12:00 p.m.: Got hair?
"They must be jealous of Spriteman..."



5:00 p.m.: Tough deadline.
"HARAKIRI or SHIMEKIRI (deadline)...?"



10:00 a.m.: Rise and shine.
"First order of business is to wake up the all-nighters."



1:30 p.m.: Bathroom was full.
"I guess there's a line to use *this* bathroom, too"



5:45 p.m.: Decision making.
"You see guys, this is how real decisions are made"



10:30 a.m.: Read the paper.
"I'm keeping up with current events."



8:00 p.m.: Detail oriented.
"Let's see where the cleaning lady missed last night. Oh, this is dusty..."



8:30 p.m.: One for the road.
"Eenie, meenie, minie, mo...No! Not the Fritos!"

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